

# DON'T LET GO

A NOVELLA



MJ SUMMERS

## ONE

### *Colorado Springs, Colorado—2008*

“Morning, beautiful.” Ben grinned at his wife, Alicia, as her eyes opened.

She smiled back and stretched her entire body lazily. “Is it Saturday?”

“Yup,” he replied in a low tone, letting his finger glide up into her tank top and over her ribs.

“*The* Saturday?”

“Yup,” he answered, his smile so big it touched both ears. “In exactly seven hours, we’ll be stepping onto the white sands of Nassau. I checked the weather report and there isn’t so much as a drop of rain in the forecast, let alone a hurricane this time.” He kissed her on the neck before he continued. “Just you and me for ten days and nights of sand, sex and snorkelling.” Kissing her warm skin again, he added, “Did I mention the sex?”

“You may have,” Alicia said. “But I have one question. What are we going to do with all those hours before we go to the airport?” she asked coyly, knowing full well what the answer would be.

“There’s only one thing I want to do with you today, but I can think of at least twenty different ways to do it,” he murmured, moving his hand down to the waistband of her panties.

“I’m in, but are there really twenty different ways to fold laundry? You’re going to have to show me,” she teased as she hopped out of bed and made her way the bathroom to brush her teeth.

Ben groaned and laughed, enjoying the view as she rushed across the room in only her tank top and panties. A minute later, Alicia emerged wearing just her panties and a naughty expression, her arms folded across her breasts. Ben gave a low whistle, reaching under the covers to quickly pull off his underwear. “I love Saturdays.”

Alicia hopped onto the bed, straddling him over the covers, pressing her hands to the pillow on either side of Ben’s head. Ben’s eyes were glued to her naked chest, his hands quickly following them. “Oh, and here I thought you were about to say you loved me,” Alicia said, lowering her face to his neck.

Ben closed his eyes for a moment, taking in the incredible sensation of what she was doing to his ear. “Oh, don’t worry, honey. I’ll always love you almost as much as I love Saturdays.”

Alicia laughed at his joke before grinding her hips into his lap. “You sure about the order of things there, Ben? Can Saturday do this to you?”

Lifting his muscular torso, Ben met Alicia’s lips with his, slowly running his tongue over her bottom lip before crushing his mouth to hers. Their tongues found each

other, dancing their familiar, perfect tango. After so many years together, their need for each other had only grown more profound, their ability to give and receive pleasure only more intense.

Ben moved his hands down to her hips and flipped her over onto her back, tossing the sheet off himself and out of his way. He was rock hard and ready to give her what he knew she wanted most, but first he wanted a taste of what was to come. Sliding his hands down to her panties, he tugged them off in one swift movement, leaving her bared to him in the morning sunlight. The streams of light hit her body and face, giving her a look that was almost angelic.

Ben gently parted her legs with his strong hands, opening her to his waiting mouth. His tongue stretched out and reached her first with one long, deliciously slow stroke along her core. Alicia's breath caught as she let her hands glide over her breasts and tummy. Ben's lips were next to touch her, sucking gently on her already wet sex. His tongue rolled over her with the exact amount of force that made her wild with pleasure, his thumbs sliding deeper inside, rubbing as his mouth worked its magic. Alicia looked down to the place where his mouth met her body, taking in the intoxicating intimacy of allowing herself to be open to him like this in the sunlight. There was nowhere to hide, but with him there was no need. His love for her was steady and strong and would last a lifetime.

Waves of pleasure pulsed through her now so powerfully they made her cry out his name as she came with Ben staying between her thighs, feeling every tiny twitch of her muscles as she let go. He brushed the sensitive skin of her inner thighs with kisses before lifting his body back in line with hers. Alicia's mouth met his hungrily, gratefully and adoringly as he held his sculpted body over hers. He lowered himself onto her, and his weight felt perfect to her, pinning her to the mattress, skin on skin. Alicia wrapped her arms around his neck and her legs around his back, clamping her ankles together. Ben pushed away from the mattress, lifting them both up to sitting. He held her on his lap, their bodies intertwined. Alicia wriggled over his midsection, bringing his hard length into her, feeling his smooth skin filling her completely. Ben pulled her down onto him, burying himself into the warmth that was her. He could feel her body tighten around him as he lifted and lowered her over him and it thrilled him like nothing else could. Her fingers gripped his back now as her tongue explored his mouth. He was in so deep and could feel her squeezing him with the passion and hunger that surged between them. Their breathing joined the rhythm of their bodies, completing the connection they shared.

"Yes, Ben!" Alicia panted. "Right there! Don't stop!"

The sounds and sights and sensations forced Ben to surrender to his own climax so powerful it tore through both of their bodies relentlessly.

Ben groaned as he came. Resting his forehead on hers for a moment, he caught his breath and grinned at her. "I love you, beautiful girl."

“More than you love Saturdays?”

“It’s a close race, but after that, I think you’re winning,” he teased, twisting his body and flopping himself onto the bed with her on top of him.

Alicia lifted herself off him, then lay beside him, her leg swung over his torso lazily. She forced a mock-angry look onto her face and then grinned. “That’s okay. I secretly love chocolate more than I love you, so I guess we can both be second best.”

“Oh, is that so?” he asked, running his hand over her thigh. He kissed her softly on the mouth. “Well, I’m going to have to take that as a challenge.”

His hand brushed over her bottom just as the phone rang.

“Ignore it,” Ben murmured as he kissed her neck. “I believe I told you I had twenty ways to do this and I’ve only completed two so far.”

“Mmm, well, then, I guess we’ll just let it ring.” Alicia lifted her face to his for a lingering kiss, trying not to hear the sound of the answering machine as it picked up in the kitchen below.

In the distance, their friend Megan’s voice could be heard. “Alicia? If you or Ben are there, please pick up. It’s about Ian. He’s in trouble.”

Alicia froze, her lips poised over Ben’s as she now strained to hear her friend. Flipping over, she reached for the phone on her bedside table.

Ben reached over and held her hand, stopping her from answering. “No, honey, please leave it. Would it be so horrible if we pretended we were already gone?”

“Yes. It would,” Alicia said, picking up the receiver.

“Hello?” She interrupted the message, causing the machine to shut off.

“Alicia?” Megan sobbed. “I’m so sorry to bother you.”

“No, sweetie, don’t be. What’s wrong?”

“I left Ian.” She paused, sobbing into the phone for a minute before catching her breath again. “I took Elliott and we’re at my parents’ place. Ian’s in a really bad way. I’m worried about him and I’m scared that he might do something to himself.”

“Oh my God, Megan, what happened?” Alicia gave Ben a worried look as she spoke to her friend.

“It’s just so awful,” Megan sobbed.

“Take your time, honey. It’s okay. We’ll do whatever we can to help.”

\* \* \*

Twenty minutes later, Alicia came down the stairs to the kitchen, now fully dressed in yoga pants and a T-shirt. Ben looked over at her as he stood in front of the stove making flapjacks. The coffee pot popped and hissed on the counter. He looked up at her with concern. “What happened?”

“Megan left him a few days ago. She brought Elliott to Boulder to stay with her parents.”

“What? Did it get that bad?”

“It sounds like it. He’s still been taking oxy after all these months, except now he’s started mixing it with alcohol and possibly some other drugs as well. I guess she came home a few nights ago and found him out cold, high and very drunk. She had left Elliott alone with him for the evening and when she got home, he was just a mess. He had been left in his crib for hours, wet and dirty and hungry. He cried so hard he vomited.” Alicia’s eyes were brimming with tears.

Ben crossed the room and wrapped his arms around Alicia, holding her tight. “Aw shit, that poor little guy. That must have been awful. Fucking Ian. He’s got everything you could want and he insists on throwing it all away.”

Alicia nodded. “I know. It’s all just so sad. I can’t believe Megan left him. She’s really scared that he’s going to OD and she is hoping that you could go check on him.”

Ben returned to the stove. “She wants me to go to Georgia? Isn’t there someone from the team who could check on him?”

“He won’t see anybody. She’s tried everyone. She thinks you’re the only one he’ll open the door for.”

“Christ, seriously?” he asked, flipping a pancake.

“It sounds really bad, Ben. I think you should go. You’re really the only thing he’s got that is even close to family.”

“Alicia, we’ve been waiting five long years for our honeymoon. Every time we’ve tried to go, something has stopped us. This is our time. Fuck him. He’s an adult. If he can’t keep his shit together, that’s his problem.”

Alicia stared up at Ben, saying nothing while she waited for him to calm down and come to the decision she knew he would make eventually.

“Can’t Megan just hire someone to go look after him?”

Alicia waited.

“Goddammit!” Ben swore under his breath as he turned to pick up a plate from next to the stove and fill it with the golden pancake. Handing it to Alicia, his shoulders slumped. “So I’m gonna have to spend our honeymoon pulling my buddy together in Georgia instead of with my wife in the Caribbean.”

Alicia took the plate and gave him a long kiss on the cheek. “I know, babe. I’m just as disappointed as you are.”

“Fucking Ian. He’s got everything. Everything. The talent to make it to the majors, the cash, the house. He’s probably been to the fucking Caribbean twenty times by now!”

“Well, Ben, you’re rich in a lot of ways he never was,” Alicia said softly, getting down two coffee mugs and filling them.

“I know,” Ben answered, his voice petulant. “I just want to be mad for a while, okay?”

“Me too. Let’s be pissed right off while we eat. When breakfast is over, we’ll call the airline and rebook the trip and find you a flight to Atlanta. Megan said she’d pay for it.”

“No, I don’t want to take their money.” He sat and took a bite. “I just can’t believe this. I know he’s seemed down since his shoulder injury, but I didn’t think he was doing this bad. Shit. Do you really think I can help him?”

“God, I hope so, Ben.”

\* \* \*

Nine hours later, Ben sat in his seat watching the colours outside darken as the plane ascended into the early evening sky. He sighed, a sick feeling settling over his chest as he thought of his friend. His friend whom he had met during his first day of rookie league tryouts in Salem, Oregon, when they were both fresh out of high school. They had been billeted at the same house and had become fast friends. Ian had had a rough life, growing up in foster care, being bounced from place to place. When the two met, they clicked right away. For three winters, Ben brought Ian home with him to the ranch during the off-season to live and work. Ian had become close to Ben’s parents, Jake and Mary, and his brother, Cole, and they had been something like a surrogate family until Ian had made the majors and Ben had given up the dream. But even after their lives went in such different directions, they had always remained steady friends.

Ian had always liked to party, at times taking things too far, but Ben had been sure he had settled down since he met Megan. He seemed so happy with her, and when their son was born last year, he had been thrilled. Ben had hoped that the time Ian had spent in the care of his own family had rubbed off on him enough to help him manage as a husband and father. Apparently Ben had been wrong. He wondered at the distance that had grown between them.

His thoughts were interrupted by the flight attendant. “Can I offer you a beverage, sir?”

Ben looked up and gave her a small smile. “Yeah, a beer, please.”

He handed her a five in exchange for his drink. Taking a long sip, his thoughts wandered to Megan and how she must be feeling. Megan was a wonderful woman. She was kind and caring and fun to be around. Ian had met her when she was living in Colorado Springs studying photography. Ben’s family had taken to her immediately when Ian brought her to the ranch for the first time. Ben could picture the look on Ian’s face as they had all sat together at the long table on the patio, eating dinner. Ian couldn’t take his eyes off her. Megan was funny and smart and clearly in love with Ian.

When dinner was over, she stood up to help clear the dishes. Looking over her shoulder, she smiled at them. "I think I'll go wash these dishes so you all can have a chance to talk about me behind my back. I know that's why Ian brought me here." She gave him a little wink. "To get your stamp of approval."

Ben smiled to himself at the memory. How could things have gone so wrong? He hoped with everything in him that he'd be able to rescue his friend from himself. The thought of Ian being apart from his little boy and his wife broke Ben's heart. Ian needed them. Megan and Elliott were all he had in this world.

\* \* \*

Alicia knocked on the front door to her mom's house with a tub of rocky road ice cream in hand. Her mom, Connie, answered, giving her a surprised look.

"What on earth are you doing here? You are supposed to be on a beach right now!" Her mom stepped aside to let her in.

"Ben had to go to Atlanta. Ian's in trouble," Alicia replied, kicking off her shoes and walking into the kitchen. Getting out two spoons, she flopped down onto a chair and held a spoon out to her mother. "Consolation ice cream?"

Connie took the spoon. "Well now, there's nothing that cures heartache like rocky road, is there? I'm so sorry about your honeymoon. I've never seen a couple have so much bad luck. First the hurricane, then your dad, now this. Did you rebook it already?"

"We did. It was tricky, though. The ranch will still be winding up the busy season so Cole offered to cover for Ben. He felt so bad for us."

"I do, too. You two need to get away for once and relax together."

"Yeah, we could use some R and R. But in the big scheme of things, postponing a vacation isn't exactly a disaster. It's nothing compared to what Megan and Ian are going through."

Alicia spent the evening with her mom, who had been widowed for two years now. They watched *When Harry Met Sally* after finishing off the ice cream. When Alicia was set to go, Connie gave her a big hug. "Thanks for coming by, sweetie. I'm sorry about your trip. I feel so bad about the last time you had to cancel."

"Mom, you couldn't help that Dad passed away."

"But if I had handled it better, you could have gone sooner."

"Mom, that's just silly. Besides, I wasn't in any shape to enjoy a romantic vacation. And did you forget that Ben's truck broke down a few days after the funeral and we needed the money to replace it? That was really the reason we had to wait so long."

"Oh, I guess I forgot that. It's all a bit of a blur, frankly."

"As it should be. Nothing happened that winter that is worth reliving."

“Yes, I suppose you’re right,” Connie agreed, then her eyebrows raised. “So, what are you doing this week now that you won’t be in the Caribbean?”

“I’m going to work. Mary could use the help at the front desk. I won’t use my vacation days right now. Why waste them, right?”

“Yes, you’re probably better off saving them for another time. Don’t work too hard, though. You need some time to relax, too.”

“Don’t worry, I’m taking care of myself, Mom,” Alicia responded. “Ben’s the one who’ll need some time to relax. I have a feeling he’s in for a tough time. I just hope he can do something for Ian while he’s there.”

“If anyone can, it’s Ben. He’s such a good boy. Which reminds me that this afternoon I was going through some old things and found a box of your school stuff. Let me grab it for you.” Connie walked down the hall and into the spare bedroom, returning with a cardboard box in her arms. “You might as well take it home. It has your yearbooks. When I opened it, it made me think about your first day of fifth grade. Ben was always meant for you, wasn’t he?”

Alicia laughed at the memory. “Pretty sure he was. Just took him so damn long to realize it.”

“Men can be a little thick-headed when it comes to love, dear.”

That night, as Alicia climbed into bed, she looked over at Ben’s side of the bed and a sense of loneliness settled over her. She had just gotten off the phone with Megan, having called to check on her. Alicia had offered to make the long drive to Boulder the next weekend to visit Megan and help her out. For now, she felt helpless to do anything for her friend. At least Ben would be in Georgia by now. The thought offered a glimmer of hope to both her and Megan when they spoke.

Getting up, she crossed the room and lifted the lid off the box her mother had given her. Taking out her yearbooks, she returned to bed. She selected her fifth grade yearbook and flipped through it, smiling to herself as a wave of memories washed over her.

**WANT TO READ MORE?  
DOWNLOAD "DON'T LET GO" FROM AMAZON NOW!**