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Last Man Standing (Black Ops, Inc)

By Cindy Gerard



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The final “powerfully intense” (*Romantic Times*) *Black Ops, Inc.* novel from *New York Times* bestseller Cindy Gerard, featuring a covert private security team and electrifying romantic suspense.

Black Ops, Inc. operative Joe Green is determined to bring to justice the man responsible for former team member Bryan Tompkins’s death. He’s convinced the ambush that killed Bryan was no coincidence, but a setup. Unsure of the consequences of the battle he’s about to start, Joe distances himself from both his Black Ops, Inc. team members and the woman he loves, Bryan’s sister, Stephanie Tompkins. But Stephanie knows there must be some reason Joe broke it off, and when she hears Joe’s charged with a murder in Sierra Leone, she wastes no time in breaking him out of prison. Then they must unravel the mystery behind the ambush, and bring resolution to a long-ago betrayal....



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Editorial Review

Review

"I look forward to her every release."

—Christine Feehan, #1 *New York Times* bestselling author

"Exciting, taut, sexy." -- *New York Times* #1 Bestseller Sandra Brown

About the Author

Cindy Gerard's *New York Times* bestselling *Black Ops, Inc.* series also includes *Show No Mercy*, *Take No Prisoners*, winner of the RITA Award for Best Romantic Suspense novel, *Whisper No Lies*, *Feel the Heat*, *Risk No Secrets*, and *With No Remorse*. She is also the author of the bestselling *Bodyguards* series and thirty contemporary romance novels. She lives in the Midwest with her husband.

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Last Man Standing

1



One week earlier

Fort Meade, Maryland

The last thing Stephanie Tompkins needed was for him to show up again. Joe knew that. Yet here he was, drawn like a storm-battered ship to the welcoming waters of a calm home port.

Jesus, it was so not fair to her. But he didn't have it in him to leave without seeing her one last time. Possibly the very last time, if this solo mission ended the way he suspected it would.

He walked slowly along the dimly lit hallway, then stopped in front of her apartment door. All of his life, he'd stood for right. Stood against wrong. Yet the choice he'd made to see this thing through blurred the lines so badly, it was hard to say where one ended and the other began.

For the first time in his life, he was scared. Not of the fight; he was scared that Stephanie was right. That he was losing himself in his need to settle a score. And he was scared spitless of losing her.

Lot of losing going on, he thought grimly. No matter how he sliced it.

It wasn't like he had any real options.

Swallowing the rock of guilt lodged in his throat, he stared down at his boots, trying to screw up some courage. The melting snow that clung to his soles had left slushy tracks on the tiled third-floor hallway. Like he was going to leave tracks all over her heart.

He checked his watch, stalling. It was going on midnight. She'd be asleep. And he was going to wake her up

to tell her something that was going to kill her. Hell, just thinking about it was killing him. But he couldn't check out on her without saying good-bye. And lie through his teeth while he did it.

His hand was cold when he finally lifted it and, after a heart-thumping hesitation, gave the door a soft rap. Maybe she wasn't home. Maybe she'd gone to her parents' in Virginia for the weekend, and would escape dealing with the shitstorm he was about to dump on her. Maybe he should turn the hell around and be gone.

Too late. He heard the soft whisper of footsteps inside the apartment, then the tentative turn of the doorknob before she slowly opened up as far as the safety chain allowed, and peered into the hall.

"Hi," he said with a clipped nod when he met the surprise in her soft brown eyes.

Everything about Steph was soft. Her lush, curvy body. Her generous smile. Her gentle nature that made a hard man like him want to play white knight and save her from the dragons that could hurt her.

But tonight he was going to be the dragon. A fire-breathing, breath-stealing, soul-defeating dragon. And he was going to hurt her bad.

If Bryan was alive, he'd damn sure kick Joe's sorry ass from here to the next zip code. Her brother wouldn't let him within shouting distance of his kid sister.

But Bry wasn't here. A lump welled up in his throat. Even fifteen years later, Bry's death was the reason Joe didn't sleep most nights. It was also the reason he had to let Stephanie go.

"Joe." Equal measures of relief, happiness, and concern colored her tone. "Hold on."

She shut the door, unhooked the chain, then swung it open again.

Her long sable hair was bed-mussed and tumbling around her shoulders. She'd hastily wrapped up in a short robe. Folds of the pale blue silk gaped open, exposing warm, sleep-flushed skin and the generous curve of a breast. She was gorgeous, sexy, spell-binding. Yet as beautiful as she was, it was her eyes that always got to him. Those soulful, deep brown eyes were like windows to her heart.

So many emotions. So little guile. And no defense at all against the onslaught of pain he was about to level.

"Come in." She stood back, opening the door wider so he could step inside. "It's freezing out there."

Another woman would have laid into him. Another woman would have slapped him hard, demanded to know where the hell he'd been for the past four weeks, then called him every name in the book before slamming the door in his face.

But she wasn't another woman. She was Steph. Giving. Forgiving. Vulnerable.

"You've got to be freezing." She turned on bare feet and headed for the kitchen. "I'll make coffee."

"Don't," he said with a stiffness in his voice that stopped her cold.

She didn't turn around. He knew that despite the brave front she was putting up, she was suddenly on the verge of losing it.

Why not? A man who loved a woman didn't treat her the way he'd treated Steph the past month—he didn't clam up, didn't not call, didn't refuse to explain himself. And he didn't show up unannounced in the middle of the fucking night and expect coffee before he sliced open a vein.

She just stood there, her silence and the rigid set of her shoulders giving away how uncertain she was, and he almost lost it himself.

"You don't have to make coffee for me," he said inanely.

Her shoulders sagged; her chin dropped to her chest.

Aw, hell.

In two steps, he came up behind her and pulled her back against him, wrapped one arm around her waist and another around her chest. With his forearm sandwiched between her breasts, he caressed her throat and tipped her head back beneath his jaw.

"I'm sorry," he whispered, lowering his lips to her hair. "Steph . . . I'm . . ." Hell.

She turned, lifted her arms around his neck, and with a desperation as sharp as the hurt in her eyes, drew his head down to hers.

"Don't talk," she murmured against his mouth. "I've missed you. I've been so scared."

He tasted the salt of her tears on her lips, and it was all over for him. He had no defense against this. No resistance.

The instant the heat of her body moved into his he reacted, like he always did when surrounded by the feel and taste of her. She was the woman he'd been waiting for his entire life, and it had been too damn long since he'd held her.

His mouth covered hers and he took what he'd been missing, but had no right to claim anymore.

"Joe," she whispered. No censure. Only giving. Only love, as he scooped her up and carried her into her bedroom, where soft lamplight cast the room in a pale glow.

Consumed in the moment, he kissed her deeply, then laid her on the bed that still held her lingering scent and warmth. Then he swiftly began shucking his clothes.

Her gaze followed every move and sent his pulse slamming as he tossed his jacket on the floor, then whipped his black sweater over his head and reached for the snap on his jeans.

Hunger flamed in her eyes as he stripped off his boots and pants and finally, naked, sank a knee onto the mattress beside her hip.

"I've missed you," she whispered again, her fingers skimming slowly up his thigh, then circling over his hip before trailing across the tightly clenched muscles of his belly.

"Missed you," she repeated on a throaty breath, and finally brushed her fingertips along the throbbing length

of his erection.

His breath caught on a groan. “Steph . . .”

“Shh . . . let me.”

He tunneled his fingers through her hair, urging her closer.

Her gaze locked on his, she sat up. Her robe slid off one shoulder to reveal the creamy round of a bare breast as she slowly, and with great attention, pressed her mouth to all the places her fingers had been, trailing fire in her wake.

He was one live electric nerve, one raging sexual urge, when she finally caressed the most sensitive part of him with a slow stroke of her tongue . . . and damn near blinded him with her passion.

He sucked in a harsh breath, let his head fall back, and knotted his hands tighter in her hair losing himself in the sweet, wet suction of her mouth.

It was always this way with her. She drove him out of his mind with the selflessness of her giving. Humbled and thrilled him with the passion of her sighs and urgency of her touch, until mindless pleasure gradually transitioned to the dawning realization that her fervor had changed to desperation. That her desire had become a plea.

Don’t leave me. Please, don’t leave me.

It was clear that she knew he’d come to say good-bye. With every kiss, every wild and reckless touch, she told him she knew, and she was begging him not to go, bargaining with him to stay.

“Steph,” he whispered, stilling her. He couldn’t let her do this. “Steph, don’t.”

He tilted her head back and saw the tears trailing down her face, her beautiful eyes so full of pain.

And he hated himself then; hated that he’d made her beg. He was so far from worth it.

“I’m sorry.” He gently laid her down, then settled her with a brush of his fingers across her cheek.

“Don’t.” She caught his face in her hands, dragged his mouth down to hers. “Don’t talk. Just love me. Please . . . just love me now.”

A better man would have resisted. A better man would have done the right thing.

But he’d stopped being a better man when he’d chosen the course that was going to take him away from her and could destroy everything he’d ever stood for.

Helpless to fight her, he lowered his body over hers and captured her mouth. And when she wrapped her ankles around his hips and opened herself for him, he drove deep. And kept on driving urgently inside her, indulging one last time in the one good thing he’d ever had going for him.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Ellen Garcia:

In this 21st centuries, people become competitive in most way. By being competitive at this point, people have do something to make them survives, being in the middle of the actual crowded place and notice by surrounding. One thing that often many people have underestimated that for a while is reading. Yep, by reading a book your ability to survive increase then having chance to stand than other is high. In your case who want to start reading any book, we give you this Last Man Standing (Black Ops, Inc) book as beginning and daily reading guide. Why, because this book is more than just a book.

Joan Cross:

Information is provisions for people to get better life, information today can get by anyone on everywhere. The information can be a understanding or any news even a huge concern. What people must be consider any time those information which is within the former life are hard to be find than now could be taking seriously which one is suitable to believe or which one the actual resource are convinced. If you have the unstable resource then you have it as your main information there will be huge disadvantage for you. All those possibilities will not happen with you if you take Last Man Standing (Black Ops, Inc) as your daily resource information.

Kim Marshall:

Spent a free time and energy to be fun activity to complete! A lot of people spent their sparetime with their family, or their particular friends. Usually they accomplishing activity like watching television, gonna beach, or picnic in the park. They actually doing ditto every week. Do you feel it? Will you something different to fill your free time/ holiday? May be reading a book might be option to fill your no cost time/ holiday. The first thing you will ask may be what kinds of book that you should read. If you want to consider look for book, may be the guide untitled Last Man Standing (Black Ops, Inc) can be great book to read. May be it might be best activity to you.

Holly Murphy:

Some individuals said that they feel bored stiff when they reading a reserve. They are directly felt that when they get a half elements of the book. You can choose typically the book Last Man Standing (Black Ops, Inc) to make your own personal reading is interesting. Your current skill of reading proficiency is developing when you just like reading. Try to choose very simple book to make you enjoy to read it and mingle the opinion about book and studying especially. It is to be initial opinion for you to like to start a book and read it. Beside that the reserve Last Man Standing (Black Ops, Inc) can to be a newly purchased friend when you're experience alone and confuse using what must you're doing of these time.

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