



Bare It All

By Lori Foster



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Detective Reese Bareden thinks he knows what makes women tick, but his ever-elusive neighbor keeps him guessing like no other. Is his goal to unmask Alice's secrets? Or protect her from a dangerous new threat? One thing is certain: their chemistry is a time bomb waiting to explode. And with no one to trust but each other, Reese and Alice are soon drawn into a deadly maze of corruption, intrigue and desire—and into the line of fire....

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Editorial Review

Review

"A red-hot page-turner."

--#1 New York Times bestselling author Kresley Cole on *When You Dare*

"Foster has an amazing ability to capture a man's emotions and lust."

--Publishers Weekly on *A Perfect Storm*

"A sexy, believable roller coaster of action and romance."

-Kirkus Reviews on *Run the Risk*

"Steamy, edgy, and taut."

-Library Journal on *When You Dare*

About the Author

Lori Foster is a New York Times and USA TODAY bestselling author with books from a variety of publishers, including Berkley/Jove, Kensington, St. Martin's, Harlequin and Silhouette. Lori has been a recipient of the prestigious RT Book Reviews Career Achievement Award for Series Romantic Fantasy, and for Contemporary Romance. She's had top-selling books for Amazon, Waldenbooks and the BGI Group. For more about Lori, visit her Web site at www.lorifoster.com.

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As she came toward him, Alice's baby-soft hair hung loose, silky tendrils drifting over her shoulders. Her big brown eyes, so innocent and yet so aware, watched him intently, the way she always watched him. She smiled, and that smile did remarkable things to him. Made him ravenous, when he'd never quite experienced anything like that before. Lust, sure. But such a powerful need? No, never.

Only with Alice.

Very close now, so close the warmth of her touched all over him, she brushed her nose against his jaw, his neck, his ear.

He groaned. Out loud. He heard it but could barely credit that the sound came from him.

From a gentle nuzzle.

Against his *ear*.

It was insane, but it took very little from her to get him painfully aroused.

"Reese?"

He wanted her mouth on him. He turned his face toward her, and he felt her breath. Hot. Then her tongue.

Wet.

"Oh...um, Reese?"

She sounded so tentative that he smiled as he reached for her and opened his eyes. His hand encountered dense fur, and the expressive brown eyes staring back at him weren't Alice's.

They weren't even human.

His dog, Cash, panted at the sign of life. Delighted to have him awake, he barked, turned a quick circle and...licked Reese's face.

Again.

"Shit." Reese dodged the dog's sloppy fondness while trying to get his bearings. The dream had felt so incredibly real. And so welcome. He shifted—and found himself cramped from head to toes...on a sofa.

Alice's sofa.

Lifting his head, he looked down at himself. He wore only boxers, and as was usually the case when he first awakened, they were tented. Hmm.

Where had the sheet gone? Ah, over the side of the couch to the floor.

Levering up to one arm, Reese attempted to orient himself—and there stood Alice at the foot of the couch, fully dressed in summer slacks and a sleeveless blouse, her hands locked together in front of her and, yes, her soft brown hair hanging loose.

But now, with him wide awake, her hair looked tidy, like Alice, not sexily ruffled as it had been in his dream.

She watched him, but those soul-sucking brown eyes weren't on his face.

They stared with absorbing attention at his morning wood.

Great. Playing kissy-face with his dog was bad enough. Scrambling for the sheet now would only make him look more foolish. He wasn't used to finding himself in tricky, uncomfortable situations. At least, not with women.

As a police detective, sure, he'd often found himself discomfited by perps, though not in boxers while sporting mahogany.

Alice was many things—a neighbor, an enigma, an irritant and a subtle bombshell.

And obviously, based on that ramped-up dream, she was also the current focus of his fantasies.

He cleared his throat. "Up here, Alice." Her curious gaze rose to his face. "Thank you. Now if you don't mind, you could turn around a moment. My modesty is beyond compromised, so it doesn't really matter to me, but with your face already going pink, I'm not sure—"

"Of course." Turning, she gave him her back. Posture stiff. Air uncertain.

That lovely fawn-colored hair fell just beyond her shoulders.

"Sorry about that." She strode, fast and unsteady, to the patio doors that led to her small deck. She'd left the door open, allowing in a muggy, late-August breeze that teased her beautiful hair.

Given the heat of his interest, air-conditioning would have been nice, but since this was Alice's apartment, and she'd been generous enough to let him crash on her couch, he wouldn't complain. Much.

"What time is it, anyway?" Sitting up, Reese reached for the sheet, but Cash sat on it. The dog watched Reese, his furry ears perked up, his expression hopeful. Reese grinned. After tugging out the sheet and covering himself, he patted the couch beside his thigh. "C'mere, boy."

The dog bounded up with over-the-moon enthusiasm. Because of the undercover sting they'd just wrapped up, he'd spent as much time away from Cash as with him—and still he and the dog had bonded.

"It's a little after one o'clock."

And she hadn't awakened him? How long had she been sneaking around the apartment?

How long had he lain there without even a sheet?

He was generally a light sleeper, so either he'd been really out of it, or she was...stealthy.

That thought bothered him and meshed with other concerns he had about Alice. Her keen observance of everything around her, combined with her cautious air, planted awful background possibilities into his head.

Then there was the way she'd come onto the scene yesterday, a big, *loaded* gun in her hand...

"Cash hasn't been out for a few hours. I was trying to lead him through without waking you, but he saw you there on the couch, and then you made...a sound."

"A sound, huh?" Given the erotic dream, he could just imagine.

"Cash sidetracked to you and—"

"I thought he was you." When her shoulders stiffened more, Reese felt devilish enough to say, "And I was having this rather sexual dream."

Wide-eyed with something akin to astonishment, she faced him, stole a peek at his lap and, when she saw he'd bunched the sheet there, she met his gaze. "What do you mean?"

"You and me." He gestured between them. "And damn, but the dream felt real." Reese scratched under Cash's furry chin. "You were near me. Breathing on me."

Indignation brought her brows together. "Breathing on you?"

Wondering when she'd catch on, he gave a sage, serious nod. "You nuzzled my ear, and I felt your hot tongue—"

Backing up fast, she bumped into the screen on the patio door and almost fell through it. After an accusatory scowl at Reese for making her stumble, she checked the screen, saw that it remained in the track and cleared her throat. "I would never—" She searched for a word and came up empty.

"Lick me?"

To his surprise, she kept quiet, but her mouth—and her expression—softened.

"No? What a shame." He gave the dog a few pats, which encouraged him to shower Reese with more affection. "But apparently Cash would."

Realization dawned. "Oh." A smile twitched. "You felt Cash trying to wake you, and you thought.?"

"Yeah. Helluva way to start my day. I mean, I'm fond of him, but." Reese looked her over. "Not that fond."

"He's adorable!"

"Sure he is." Reese had only recently gotten the dog, and while he'd never considered himself a pet-lover, he and Cash were getting acclimated—with Alice's help. "I just don't want you mistaking my..." He nodded at his lap. "Reaction."

Though she covered her mouth, a short laugh escaped, anyway.

That laugh was as mesmerizing as her smile, and his sheet-covered boner twitched. "Keep it up, and I'll never get it under control."

Rather than backing up or blushing again, she chastised him. "Really, Reese. It's not something to talk about."

"Not something to be embarrassed over either." But he sort of was, anyway. What was it about Alice that affected him so profoundly—and so physically? "Not to minimize your appeal, but it happens to most guys in the morning."

"When they awaken, you mean?"

"Yeah. It's called morning wood, or in this case, afternoon wood, I guess."

"I see." She tipped her head to study him. "But when you knocked on my door this morning, you were wide awake, fully dressed and had just finished working."

He'd also been aroused over the possibility of spending more intimate time with her. Knowing he shouldn't

tell her that—yet—he scrubbed a hand over his tired eyes.

"Yet even then," she continued, her tone mischievous and teasing, "you had a...um..."

Having her talk about it wasn't helping. Reese trapped her gaze with his own. "An erection."

"Yes." A little too matter-of-factly, she nodded. "You had one then, also." Though the color in her fair skin intensified, she didn't look away. "You told me not to worry about it."

"I know what I said." God, he wanted to kiss her. If she'd been any other woman, he would have.

But he hadn't known Alice that long, and what he did know of her kept him from pushing things. Already, thanks to the fiasco the day before, she'd seen the hazards of his job.

Wasn't every day that murderers and hoods, the very criminals he investigated, showed up on his doorstep. It was even more uncommon for those offenders to get the drop on him. Usually he was great at his job. But yesterday...yeah, he'd suffered a first-class cluster fuck—and Alice had managed to get right in the middle of it.

Maybe that's why he'd been dreaming of her. She'd been helping out by watching his dog while he and his partner closed in on their quarry, and then when shit went sideways yesterday, she'd recognized the deadly situation and sent in reinforcements.

He eyed her understated, prim facade that hid so much intuition, bravery and cunning. "You will never have reason to worry about anything with me."

"Okay."

She was the most curious woman, and that, too, could explain his unaccountable reaction to her. "Just like that, huh?"

"I know you're honorable."

Sensible Alice. Of course she was right—he *was* honorable, most especially where women were concerned. But in the short time they'd known each other, how could she possibly be that confident about his intentions?

She couldn't.

So he'd taken in a stray dog—a dog she now adored. So what? He was polite, mannerly, dressed well and had his own proper persona. It meant nothing, and she should realize that.

Yet from what he'd seen so far she had great instincts.

The type of instincts usually honed in the field.

When she'd agreed to let him sleep on her couch, he'd thought to use the time alone with her in her apartment to do some in-depth talking. His curiosity about her was extreme, almost as sharp as his attraction.

But once she'd made up the couch for him, he'd sat down and exhaustion had all but pulled him under. Their

talk had stalled.

Then.

Now he had all the time in the world. Or at least for the rest of the day. "Alice—"

"I should take Cash out. *Again.*" She smiled at the dog with consuming love. "We both know he'll only hold it for so long."

She had the prettiest, sweetest smile—when she smiled. Not that she seemed to know it. Hell, if it wasn't for his dog, or the carnage in his apartment.

Remembering the carnage, the very reason for being on Alice's too-small couch instead of his own spacious bed, Reese groaned.

Alice paused in her attentions to Cash. "Are you okay?" She inched closer. "Did you get hurt yesterday?"

"I'm fine." But frustrated. Yesterday, in the culmination of a lengthy investigation, a damn parade had trooped through his apartment. Friends, suspects and heinous thugs. *Murderous* thugs. Thugs so ugly, their souls were surely black and decrepit.

Rowdy Yates, a "witness"—what a joke that had turned out to be—who should have been in protective custody, instead had gone to Reese's apartment to snoop. Alice had recognized that Rowdy was up to no good and had called Reese. He'd gotten to his apartment only minutes before his lieutenant also showed up.

They'd all been taken unawares by the lowlifes, and while a gun stayed on Rowdy, Reese and the lieutenant had been handcuffed to the headboard of his bed. That he and the female lieutenant butted heads more often than not made it an especially unpropitious situation. Lieutenant Peterson hadn't taken it well, and his efforts to shield her had been met with much resistance.

Instead of getting the protection afforded all witnesses, Rowdy had ended up a target for death. He had abilities, which included breaking into Reese's apartment to snoop, but against two gunmen set on executing him? The odds had not been with him. If they'd killed Rowdy, they would have next turned those guns on Reese and the lieutenant.

Without Alice's help, there would have been several dead bodies in his apartment, instead of just one.

And hell, one was bad enough. It wasn't easy to get *death* out of the carpet, curtains and off the walls.

Fortunately, sensible Alice had assessed the situation and sent in Reese's good friend Detective Logan Riske as backup. Because Logan possessed a lethal skill set unique to only a select few, he'd gotten the upper hand—but not before taking a bullet to the arm.

Chaos had reigned for a couple of minutes, all but destroying Reese's bedroom. In the end, they'd apprehended one gunman and another man who'd played lookout at the front of the apartment building.

The worst villain Reese had ever known had died from a broken neck. Never again would he threaten anyone.

Reese eyed Alice with renewed interest. At the tail end of the bloody melee, not long after Reese had been freed from the cuffs, Alice had shown up in his apartment with a big gun held in her slender, delicate hand.

She was a good judge of character, but then, so was he. And in his gut, Reese knew his straitlaced, often silent, skittish, timid and sexy-as-hell neighbor would have used that gun with fatal precision.

It made his blood run cold and ramped up his interest in her and her past. So many unanswered questions. He knew Alice was good with his dog and that he liked her. He definitely knew he wanted to get her under him.

But so far their relationship had been so odd, he didn't even know her last name yet. Alice...something or other.

Insane.

She inched closer still—*just as she had in his dream.*

"You have some dark bruising."

Reese followed her concerned gaze to his wrist and saw the ugly marks there, testament to how he'd tried to free himself from the key-lock metal cuffs—*his own friggin' handcuffs*—that had been used against him.

"It's fine." Never had he felt more helpless than when he'd been in those restraints, knowing that his own failure could facilitate the murder of others. Never again would he be caught unawares.

Once was more than enough.

Alice hesitated. "Are you hurt anywhere else?"

Other than his pride at being taken off guard in his own apartment. "No." He wanted nothing more than to move past it all.

She accepted that without an excess of coddling. "Your friend will be all right?"

"Logan? He's a detective, like me."

"I thought so. When I saw him yesterday, I knew he was safe."

Safe? The things she said always had double meanings. "Just as you knew the others were dangerous?" Alice had seen people come into the apartment building, and somehow she'd known they weren't friends. Not only was she astute, but she also wasn't afraid to react—thank God.

"Yes." She gave him a level stare. "I can usually tell."

How? Reese wanted to know. It wasn't as if criminals walked around with a damn sign on their foreheads. God knew, if they did, his job would be a hell of a lot easier.

As a detective, he'd dealt with enough shady characters that he'd gained something of a sixth sense about them. He noticed things, slight nuances that others missed.

But what had happened in Alice's life to give her that edge? "Logan is fine. You met Pepper?"

"Yes. She stayed in my apartment with me while Detective Riske went to your aid."

"Call him Logan—I'm sure he'd insist." Reese thought of the moment when he'd realized Logan had been shot. He hadn't let the wound slow him down, until blood loss had done that for him. "He's home with Pepper now, healing and no doubt being pampered."

Because of Alice's quick thinking, Reese and his friends were all alive, and a very bad character dealing in every aspect of corruption, including new ventures into human trafficking, was dead.

Reese had a lot of regrets for how things had gone down yesterday, but he didn't feel even a smidge of remorse over that.

Alice tipped her head. "Logan and Pepper are in love?"

"He is for sure." It wasn't like him to talk out of turn, but he heard himself say, "And that added to the craziness of the sting. Cops going undercover do *not* fall in love with key witnesses."

"Why not?"

"Complications, for one thing. Hard to think rationally when you're emotionally involved."

"He didn't seem emotional to me. As soon as I related my suspicions, he took over. He stuffed Pepper into my apartment, prepared himself the best he could and warned us—unnecessarily, I might add—to keep the doors locked."

"Knowing Pepper, that had to be a laugh a minute."

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Thomas Bedwell:

Typically the book Bare It All will bring you to the new experience of reading a book. The author style to spell out the idea is very unique. If you try to find new book to study, this book very acceptable to you. The book Bare It All is much recommended to you to learn. You can also get the e-book from your official web site, so you can quickly to read the book.

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Liza Serrano:

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