

The Texas Renegade Returns (Harlequin DesireTexas Cattleman's Club:)

By Charlene Sands

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Cara's instincts tell her to stay away from a man who lied to her, who tried to steal her family's company. Except she has a secret, too—she's pregnant with his child.

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Editorial Review

About the Author
Charlene Sands is a USA Today bestselling author of contemporary and historical romances. She's been honored with The National Readers' Choice Award, Booksellers Best Award and Cataromance Reviewer's Choice Award. She loves babies,chocolate and thrilling love stories.Take a peek at her bold, sexy heroes and *real good men!*

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&#34I'm terribly sorry Mr. del Toro, but Miss Windsor is very busy right now. She can't see you today."

Alex stared at Cara's assistant who didn't sound sorry at all. She sat stiff-shouldered behind her Plexiglas desk in the austere offices of Windsor Energy like a mama bear protecting her cub. She was doing her job, so he couldn't blame her for that, but that Wicked Witch of the West glare she was giving him had to go.

Now that the truth about his real identity was out, friendly faces in Royal, Texas, were a rare commodity. You'd think he'd sprouted gills and swam with piranha. Old man Windsor had probably alerted his security staff to usher him out of the building on sight. He'd deal with Paul Windsor another time. Today, he'd come for Cara and he wasn't leaving Windsor Energy without her.

He darted his gaze at Cara's office door. *Dios*, he was dying to see her. He had things to tell her that could not wait.

He aimed his best smile straight at the middle-aged assistant. As a boy in Mexico, his natural charm had served him well and he'd learned how to get around his schoolteachers and later, as a young man, he'd perfected the art of persuasion with the opposite sex. Now, the only woman he cared about persuading was Cara Windsor.

"Miss," he said, verifying the woman's name by her nameplate, "Miss Potter, you look like a reasonable woman and I would never want you to risk your job, so perhaps you can simply let Miss Windsor know I'm here. Or, I can take it upon myself to open her door unannounced. I don't think Miss Windsor would appreciate the intrusion and I really don't want to barge in, but one way or another," he said, gesturing toward Cara's door, "I will be seeing her today." He kept his smile from wavering.

Miss Potter's shoulders gave an inch. Her eyes begged for understanding. "I'm supposed to call Security if you should ever show up here."

"You don't want to do that, do you?"

"No, but Mr. Windsor issued the order. And everyone knows…"

"What do they know?"

Her gaze dipped to the desktop. "That you broke Cara's heart."

Ouch! Miss Potter didn't mince words. This was just a taste of what he was up against.

"I can assure you, I am not going to hurt Cara, so rather than get you in trouble for not doing your job, let us just pretend I didn't stop by your desk. I will just let myself into her-"

"Gayle? What's going on here?"

Cara's lilting voice drifted from the doorway. It smoothed all of his rough edges and calmed him down inside. He pivoted on his heels and turned around.

Seeing Cara's beautiful face tore him up inside. She had one slender hand on the edge of the door, her body half in, half out of the doorway. The fluorescents shimmered over her straight blond hair and cascaded over her shoulders as smooth as golden honey. Memories came to mind of those soft silky locks teasing over his face as she made love to him right after he'd been released from the hospital.

Today, she wore a business suit of slate-gray, nothing special, nothing noteworthy, but on her, it looked like a *Vogue* fashion cover. His gaze drifted to her white blouse underneath, clinging to her skin and dipping into the valley between her breasts.

How he missed her.

Her eyes rounded on him and the sparkle in those blue gems faded. Breath rushed out of her like a hiss. "Alex, what are you doing here?" So much for *smooth* and *lilting.*

"I came for you."

She began shaking her head and set her chin firmly. "You can't be here."

Gayle Potter rose from her seat. "I'm sorry, Miss Windsor. I tried to stop him."

"She did. She tried to stop me. But as you know-"

"You're not stoppable, when you want something." Her mouth pulled down, sweeping away any welcome on her face.

He had a lot of making up to do.

"It's okay, Gayle," she said. "I understand."

"Should I call S-Security?"

Cara's chest rose and fell and she sighed. "No, I'll handle this. If you could excuse us a moment and take your break, I'll walk Mr. *del Toro* out."

He cringed at the bitterness spewing from her lips. He was here to rectify his mistakes, not hurt her anymore.

Gayle darted a worried glance at both of them as she grabbed her bag and scooted out of the office.

"Certainly, I'll be in the lounge if you need me."

"You shouldn't even be in this building," Cara was saying.

"Huh? Oh, what?" He found himself staring and following her every movement. His memories of her didn't do her justice. He hadn't seen her for weeks and he'd almost forgotten the blue sparkle in her pretty eyes, like the ocean when first touched by morning sun. He'd almost forgotten the round full shape of her breasts. And legs that made him want to weep when they wrapped around him.

She'd made him laugh, too. They'd do the silliest things together and act like kids without a care in the world. No wonder he'd fallen so hard and fast for her.

"I said.you need to leave."

"I'll leave as soon as you agree to come with me. We need to talk."

Her expression hardened, and she gazed at him as if he were nothing more than a stranger. But he wasn't a stranger. He was still the same man. If he could only convince her of that. He couldn't accept that it was over between them. He'd explain and apologize, but first, he had one other thing to do.

"I don't know you, Alex del Toro," she said. "I thought I knew you, back when I was foolish and so naive. The Alex Santiago I fell in love with and planned to marry was sweet and caring. He and I clicked. But that's not who you are, is it? You're not Alex Santiago. It was all a lie. Everything about you is a lie. You used me and, what's saddest of all, you don't remember any of it. If you did, you wouldn't be standing here today asking to see me. You'd know it's pointless, amnesia or not."

"Cara," he said. "It's not pointless. Come with me. I promise it won't take long." He'd blown it with her big-time, but it wasn't going to end this way. He glanced at her left hand. She wasn't wearing his engagement ring. His stomach nose-dived with dread. She hated him.

With wary eyes, she glanced down the hallway that led to the main entry. "My father's due back in the office in ten minutes. If he sees you here, he'll have you dragged out of the building."

Alex took his best shot. He had nothing else to lose. More than restoring his good name to his friends and colleagues in the county, he needed Cara to hear him out. To believe in him again. "Then why create a scene here where you work? I'm only asking for an hour of your time. I promise to deposit you right back here when we're through." Or not. If things went as planned, Alex would be taking her to his home in Pine Valley.

An exasperated sigh fell from her lips. She glanced at her watch, then at the front doorway again. He didn't know it, but Paul Windsor was helping Alex win back Cara. "Okay," she said softly. "I'll go with you, but only because my father's blood pressure will explode if he sees you."

Dios, that took some doing.

As for Paul Windsor, if Alex's suspicions were correct, the man with four ex-wives wouldn't be available to marry a fifth wife. He'd be in prison.

On kidnapping and attempted-murder charges.

"Give me a minute, Alex. I'll meet you outside. Where are you parked?"

"First red Ferrari you see in the parking lot." He smiled. She'd helped him pick out the car. Red was her favorite color. He remembered that about her, too.

He remembered almost everything now.

* * *

Cara leaned over her desk and scribbled a quick note to Gayle, telling her not to say a word to anyone about Alex. She also told her loyal assistant not to worry.

If only she wasn't worried. She had her doubts about going with Alex. Months ago, he'd disappeared right after their engagement. There had been no sign of him anywhere and at first she'd pretty much panicked. Alex wouldn't have left without saying something to her. He wouldn't have given her an engagement ring, pledged undying love and then walked away. She'd held on to the hope that he'd forgotten to tell her he was going on a business trip where he couldn't be reached. But she'd never heard back from him. Days had turned into weeks. No one had heard from him. As soon as he'd proposed to her, Alex had disappeared. Many people had speculated that his disappearance was suspicious and there was some sort of foul play involved. Some had been sure he was the victim of a crime. Initially, Cara had believed the same.

But as time wore on, she'd secretly feared Alex had run out on her because he didn't love her enough. Crazy thoughts and doubts entered her head. She'd lived under a constant sense of self-torture. Alex regretted his decision to marry her. Alex had gone back to an ex-lover. She wasn't the woman for him and he didn't have the courage to tell her.

Cara sighed as she glanced at the tall, dark and dangerously handsome man staring at her with eyes gleaming. She, along with the rest of the world, now knew the truth.

Alex had been discovered among a group of immigrants sneaking into the United States after their truck collided with another car. It was all one big mystery and Alex claimed amnesia. He didn't remember much of his disappearance. But he'd had serious injuries, including a concussion and broken wrist from the collision. Cara had thought the worst about him and lived with guilt for weeks, scolding herself for thinking he'd run out on her. Fool that she was, she'd tried everything she could think of to bring back his memory while he was in the hospital. Nothing had worked.

Cara walked out of her office, her heels furiously clicking against sleek gray-slate floors. She had no time to spare. Her father was due back any minute and those were fireworks she never wanted to see.

Stepping outside, Texas sunlight poured over her. She slipped on her sunglasses and scoured around. Alex was hard to miss. She found him leaning against his slick red sports car, his arms crossed and his black hair catching light rays. He was wearing black trousers, a soft white shirt and a devastating smile. Cara's breath caught again. It happened every time she laid eyes on him.

Fraud, she kept shouting in her head.

Yet, her heart pinged at the sight of him.

Alex Santiago had never really existed and the truth had broken her heart. He was Alejandro del Toro, only

son and heir to Del Toro Oil, who'd come from Mexico to spy on their biggest rivals, Windsor Energy. Alex had created a false identity, lived for over a year in Maverick County posing as Alex Santiago and had used her as a pawn to extract information about her father's successful oil business. The truth came to light after Alex was discovered alive and brought back to town. Concerned about his son's health and hoping to help him recover from amnesia, Rodrigo del Toro revealed to the world Alex's true identity and the real reason he'd come to Texas in the first place-to spy on Windsor Oil.

The burn of that betrayal still seared her with pain.

It didn't matter that Alex couldn't remember any of it.

His amnesia didn't make him any less guilty. Her father had never liked her choice of fiancé and he'd been right all along about Alex. That was the biggest crime. Her father, who'd been married and divorced four times, had better insight about Alex than she did. What a fool she'd been.

She left three feet of pavement between them. "I really don't want to do this."

"I know. I appreciate your time."

He came forward to wind his hand around hers and lead her to the passenger-side door. Her palms grew damp from his touch. His strength and power was always a big turn-on. How she'd loved him once.

A part of her was glad he had amnesia. A part of her wished she had it, too.

She stood by the open door. "Where are we going?"

His eyes were nearly black. When they made love, she would slowly sink into them. "You'll see. I won't harm you, Cara. I'm still the same Alex you knew."

Not true. She didn't argue with him though. She slipped into the leather seat and fastened her seat belt. Alex got behind the wheel and pulled out of the parking lot.

He was quiet on the drive. It was fine with her. She relaxed back against the seat and stared out the front window. For about three minutes. Then her gaze slid from the highway to his handsome face. His profile alone could sell magazines to millions of women. She forced her eyes back to the road.

Don't remember his hands caressing your body. Don't remember his mouth pressing yours. Don't remember the scent of his hot skin when he was aroused and ready to make love to you.

Beautiful memories clicked away in her mind. Her head ached with them. She didn't want to believe him a liar, user, fraud and spy. But he was all those things. And here she was, sitting beside him, giving him her time and using her father as the excuse to steal away with him. *Cara, you dumbass.*

Alex made a right turn off the highway that led away from town. Storefronts and residential streets gave way to the open road. Tight muscles in her neck began to relax. Rolling her shoulders, her stiffness dropped away there, too. She came alive in the country. Across the flatlands, ranches came into view. Roadside wildflowers bursting with color sprouted up along the miles and miles of fences.

Alex hit the controls and the windows rolled all the way down. Gentle springtime breezes replaced the air-

conditioning. Her hair blew into her eyes. She didn't bother trying to fix the mass of blond whipping at her cheeks.

"Now, please close your eyes."

"Why?"

A few strands of his black hair danced across his forehead as he smiled-a dashing-marauder kind of smile. "Because I asked you nicely."

She didn't want to do him any favors, but she'd agreed to this. One hour was all the time she would give him, and twenty of those minutes were already up. She closed her eyes.

"Thank you," he said.

Those two softly spoken words squeezed tight inside her heart.

Not long after, he parked the car. "Keep them closed," he said.

The swooshing of quiet waters drifted into her ears. Distant music played and her nostrils were hit with crisp fresh air. "For how long?"

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