



Running Wild

By Susan Andersen

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They can't escape the heat...

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Finn's peaceful vacation is blown to bits the second Mags strides into view. For years he's ignored his family's pleas to settle down. Now he's falling hard for a blonde force of nature who's allergic to commitment. First he has to keep Mags safe as they search for her missing parents. Then they can determine if it's time to stop running—and take a chance on the wildest thrill he's ever known...

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Editorial Review

Review

"This warm summer contemporary melts hearts with the simultaneous blossoming of familial and romantic love."

-Publishers Weekly on That Thing Called Love

"Guaranteed snap, sizzle and sass!"

--New York Times bestselling author Carly Phillips

"A smart, arousing, spirited escapade that is graced with a gentle mystery, a vulnerable, resilient heroine, and a worthy, wounded hero and served up with empathy and a humorous flair."

-Library Journal on Burning Up

"A sexy feel-good contemporary romance...a winner."

--Publishers Weekly on Bending the Rules

About the Author

Susan Andersen is a bestselling author and proud mama of a grown son. She lives in the Pacific Northwest with her husband of over forty-five years and her cats Boo and Mojo. To be added to Susan's email list to hear about upcoming releases, please visit her website at www.susanandersen.com and enter your email address on the contact page. Or become a member of her Facebook fan page at <http://www.facebook.com/SusanAndersenFanPage>.

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Santa Rosa, El Tigre—South America

The blonde strode into the cantina as if she owned the joint, instantly snagging Finn Kavanagh's attention. The afternoon had been laden with impulses and he congratulated himself on following the one that had brought him here.

He'd only arrived in the capital city of this tiny South American country some forty-five minutes ago. After the usual long day of travel frustrations, he'd fully intended to head straight to the hostel that a Kavanagh Construction vendor had recommended. But when the always-in-motion network of overhead gondolas caught his attention, he'd hitched his backpack over one shoulder and tracked down the nearest Metrocable station instead.

As he'd ridden toward the crest of the crazy-steep hill to the north, he'd enjoyed the hell out of the bird's-eye view of the sprawling, bustling city in the valley below. Mountain views from every angle and a river that cleaved the town in two took an already amazing vista and turned it into something flat-out spectacular, sending him reaching for his camera. The higher the gondola had risen on its steep climb to the destination station, however, the more run-down the area below had become. Shanties stood cheek-to-jowl on the flats and if the patchwork roofs were anything to go by, the places were made from whatever materials the

dweller could scrounge. More rickety dwellings supported by fragile-looking stilts rose out of the verdant green foliage of the hillside. From Finn's overhead perspective, the area looked big-time poverty-stricken.

The woman who pushed through the door, on the other hand, looked like a million bucks. He frowned, because that wasn't quite right. The vibe she projected wasn't even close to rich girl. But she was sure as hell easy on the eyes.

Real easy.

Not that he could put an exact finger on what it was about her that so captured his attention. She was pretty, yes, but not at all his usual type. Okay, he didn't really have a type. But he could honestly say he'd never gone for the punk girls.

And this chick was definitely that, with those sleek blond sidewalls and the longer, shaggier top that ended in bangs bisecting her eyebrows in edgy points. It was far from a look he was ordinarily drawn to, yet something about her was setting off serious sparkage.

And he honest-to-God didn't understand why.

She was a medium-tall, blue-eyed blonde but, hell, he was thirty-four years old; he'd met an abundance of those. He couldn't claim to have seen many blondes since arriving in this part of the world, but then he'd been here less than an hour. They held no novelty in Seattle, however, the city he'd called home since birth. And while she had a fine body, again it wasn't Vegas-showgirl material.

Maybe it was the energy she projected so strongly that it practically generated a red aura around her. Or her general vibe, which hinted she not only knew the score, but had maybe even invented it. Hey, a man could hardly ask for more than that, right? Sipping the cold brew he'd ordered, he lounged back in his chair and watched as she strode up to the bar. He made no bones about eavesdropping when she ordered up a drink.

Not that it did him a helluva lot of good. She spoke in liquid, rapid-fire Spanish.

Okay, language barrier. That was kind of deflating. He didn't know why he'd gotten the impression she was American. Maybe it was the fair skin and light hair in a room full of dark-complexioned, dark-haired people. Or the cargo shorts and double tank tops, or that shoulders-squared, tits-out posture with a 'tude. Whatever it was, her Spanish was fluid and sounded like no American-accented version he'd ever heard. He was hardly an expert, but he'd bet it was her first, and quite possibly only, language.

Damn.

The unexpected disappointment had him straightening in his chair. *No.* It was just as well. He'd come to El Tigre for a vacation, partly because he just plain needed one—and partly because lately he'd begun questioning the choices he'd made. Choices that until recently he'd found perfectly satisfying.

He laid the blame for the current rise in secondguessing himself squarely on his brother's shoulders. Of the seven Kavanagh siblings, he was closest to Devlin in both age and shared interests—and last year Dev had gone and gotten himself hitched. The guy was so moon-faced in love with his wife, Jane, that Finn was kind of embarrassed for him.

Yet he found himself surprisingly envious as well. And *that* tipped so far to the left of normal he could

hardly wrap his mind around it.

Despite—or more likely partly because of—Aunt Eileen's constant harping about how it was time he traded in his bachelor ways for the love of a good woman, he'd always reveled in his single status. He'd sure as hell never harbored a burning desire to change from a *me* to a *we*. He got enough of that crap working side by side with his brothers every day. So when he'd suddenly begun questioning why he'd been patting himself on the back simply because he'd dodged having a special woman in his life for longer than a night or the occasional weekend, it had stirred up a never-before-encountered restlessness. An itchy sensation that had reached epic proportions when he'd started to wonder if maybe it wasn't time he joined the ranks of the committed-to-one-relationship grown-ups.

So, hell, *yeah*, he was jumpy. His thoughts had never trekked that particular trail before. And he could honestly say he wasn't all that thrilled to have them trekking it now.

That he was even thinking about settling down, however, had driven home how much he needed to get away and see if this was something he actually wanted—if maybe it *was* time he grew up and joined the marriage brigade that was an integral part of his large, extended family.

Or if he had simply been brainwashed by all the happy-happy shit that seemed to surround him these days.

His gut told him it was the latter, but with these chicktype thoughts popping into his head lately, who was to say his gut wasn't overcompensating?

In any event, he didn't have to figure out everything right this minute. All he really needed to do this evening was drink his beer, check out the pretty girl and contemplate which route in this part of the Andes he most wanted to hike. And relax. Yeah, especially that.

Above all else he'd come here to relax.

This was the worst damn birthday Magdalene Deluca could ever remember. God knew, a few back in her early teens had been pretty crappy, but that happened when a girl's parents shipped her off to boarding school in order to free up more time to pour their missionary fervor into other people's kids. Gazing at the shot of tequila the bartender had just given her, she was sorely tempted to toss it back where she stood and hold out the empty for a refill. Hey, she liked to party as much as the next woman and if she got a little buzzed...well, there was no one here she had to be accountable to for her behavior.

A bitter laugh escaped her. *No shit.*

All the same, she walked away from the bar, took a seat at a nearby table and simply stared for a moment into the pale amber liquor. Then she picked up a wedge of lime, bit into it and tossed back the shot of tequila. She shuddered as warmth flowed down her throat and spread through her veins. Yet it didn't touch the coldness in the pit of her stomach. But that was her own fault. Because, dammit, would she never learn?

She'd taken a leave of absence from her life in California to come running down here. The last two letters from her mother had detailed Nancy Deluca's distress with the way the Munoz cartel, over her frequent, clearly stated objections, kept trying to recruit some of the barely teenaged boys and girls the Delucas mentored. It wasn't the letters alone that had brought Mags to El Tigre, however, although those had certainly set up a niggling in the pit of her stomach. It was the way all communication from her mom suddenly ceased after she'd received them. *That* had really made her get her butt in gear.

The abrupt lack of communication had given her a very bad feeling. Because while both the United States and the relatively newer, kinder El Tigre regime had worked to clean up the proliferation of drug cartels down here, plenty of crime syndicates still existed. So did the violence that accompanied them. And despite a bombardment of government-sponsored aerial herbicide spraying, illegal coca crops hadn't been wiped out. Some of the minor grow farms had disappeared, but the larger cartels had merely scaled down their operations and redistributed them to a few smaller, harder-to-reach plots.

Mags hadn't seen her parents in years. But she didn't think for a minute that her very vocal mother had changed during their time apart. Nancy had never been shy about stating her disapproval over anything she considered wrong.

Mags worried that very fact might have put her parents in danger.

Well, fool me once, right? Because, it turned out she was a chump. No, hell, why be so modest?

She was the freakin' *queen* of chumps.

She had dropped everything and wiped out her meager savings. Worse, she'd given up a prime makeup artist position on a space epic that would have *rocked* and for which she had campaigned for over a year. All in order to run to the rescue.

God, wasn't that rich? Considering she'd been informed by her parents' landlord when she arrived at their place that the missionaries had gone back to the States on a sabbatical.

They'd just up and left. Without mentioning a word to her about it.

She knew it shouldn't come as a shock, or feel like such a betrayal. Heck, she'd learned five months, two weeks and three days after her thirteenth birthday that not only wasn't she a priority in her parents' lives, but she was an obstruction to their accomplishing everything they'd come to El Tigre to get done. So if they didn't feel the need to let her know that they'd be in the States for a while, well...fine, then. It was nothing new. And she frankly didn't give a rat's ass.

Or not much of one, anyhow.

Mags straightened in her seat. Why was she even thinking about this anyway? Families were what they were; whining about it was pointless. Looking around for something to distract her from her thoughts, she caught a guy checking her out.

Great. That was what she needed—some local lounge lizard looking to score. And yet...

Locking eyes when his lazy gaze reached her face, she found herself unable to look away. For one thing, she was wrong. His coloring might fit with the locals, but he was definitely American. It was clear in the clothing and excellent dentistry.

Brown hair flopped in deep-set bittersweet chocolate-colored eyes and it took some effort to tear her gaze away. But given the way the rest of her day had gone, gawking instead at the wide shoulders that topped what she could see of a lean, muscular frame probably wasn't an improvement, so she went back to admiring that face.

Its flesh was close to the bone and, coupled with his long bony nose, gave him the austere look of a Trappist monk. Yet when she met his dark-eyed gaze again, she encountered a world of heat.

And for a single tempting instant she considered going over to his table and starting something up. She had a boatload of aggression she'd just love to work off.

But...no. She was going to collect the beater car she'd left down in the valley, where the economically depressed barrio that had been her folks' most recent stomping grounds gave way to a neighborhood a bit more affluent. Or where she'd at least had less fear that she'd come back to find the car sitting on its axles, stripped of its few amenities. With a final regretful look at the hot monk guy, she picked up her huge purse and headed for the door, pulling the tote's long strap over her head and settling the bag cross body as she walked.

The cantina had hardly been what anyone would call a bastion of silence, but the wall of sound that came off the streets the moment Mags pushed through the doors rocked her back on her heels. The engine of a highend SUV roared as it started up and equally noisy motorcycles wove in and out of the ubiquitous old Volkswagens clogging the narrow avenue. Young men and women laughed and talked and called to each other as they made their way between bars and restaurants. A little girl on a big bicycle pedaled within an inch of Mags's toes.

After dancing out of the kid's way, she stopped at a donkey-drawn cart full of mangoes to escape the crush long enough to reset her mental compass. She bought two of the green-and-blush-colored fruits and dropped them into her purse, then made a beeline toward the street that would take her back to the route she'd used earlier to come up from the valley.

After learning her folks had bailed without so much as a forwarding address, she'd had a potent urge to burn off the overload of furious energy that made her nerves jump and her heart pound so furiously. But had she collected her rental car like a smart person would have and gotten her butt to the airport to catch the first plane out of here? Oh, no. She'd thought climbing the steep hills to this neighborhood was a good idea.

It didn't make sense to her right now, but at the time it had struck her as a good way to work off her agitation.

And to some extent it had been.

Except now she was in no mood to navigate her way back down to the valley. Still, the sooner she got herself down the cliff-like hill, the sooner she could get her ass back to California. Clearly she wasn't needed in El Tigre. And since it had only been late yesterday that she'd had to say thanks, but no thanks to the position on the film, maybe there was a slim chance she could still get in on the production.

Here's hoping. Because she knew exactly what an enormous boost the gig would give her career. At the very least it would allow her to give up her other job.

And creating aliens with paints and putties would be a fabulous stress-buster. She could use that about now.

She walked several blocks before it occurred to her that she'd seen a cable station earlier when she'd been searching for a place to park the car. She couldn't remember precisely where, and she had zero familiarity with Santa Rosa. In her golden pre-boarding-school days, she and her folks had lived first in rough-and-tumble Tacna, further south, then in a small township in the northern Amazon region.

But the Metrocable ran north and south, so even if it was a long walk between the station and her car, it would be on level ground. And that beat picking her way down the near-vertical hills.

Content to have a plan, she about-faced and started back the way she'd come.

She'd reached the main street and had just come to the opposite end of the block from the cantina where she'd had her drink when a man suddenly materialized out of nowhere and shoved her up against the brick building. Heart slamming up against the wall of her chest, she sucked in a deep breath, prepared to scream her head off.

Before she could, however, a rough, dry-skinned hand covered her mouth. The man, who wasn't much taller than she—and was a good ten years younger—shoved his face close to hers. "I'll take my hand away if you agree not to scream," he said in colloquial Spanish. "I don't want to hurt you, but I will if you make a fuss. *Comprende?*"

Not really, but she nodded her head.

"Good," he said, dropping his hand and taking a short step back. "You're coming with me. Victor Munoz wants to talk to you."

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Troy Ethridge:

Playing with family within a park, coming to see the ocean world or hanging out with buddies is thing that usually you could have done when you have spare time, in that case why you don't try thing that really opposite from that. A single activity that make you not sensation tired but still relaxing, trilling like on roller coaster you have been ride on and with addition details. Even you love Running Wild, you can enjoy both. It is very good combination right, you still need to miss it? What kind of hang-out type is it? Oh occur its mind hangout people. What? Still don't obtain it, oh come on its named reading friends.

George Finch:

Running Wild can be one of your basic books that are good idea. Many of us recommend that straight away because this e-book has good vocabulary that may increase your knowledge in vocabulary, easy to understand, bit entertaining but still delivering the information. The writer giving his/her effort to get every word into joy arrangement in writing Running Wild nevertheless doesn't forget the main place, giving the reader the hottest along with based confirm resource data that maybe you can be considered one of it. This great information could drawn you into completely new stage of crucial thinking.

Vincent Mireles:

This Running Wild is great e-book for you because the content and that is full of information for you who always deal with world and have to make decision every minute. That book reveal it details accurately using great coordinate word or we can state no rambling sentences in it. So if you are read that hurriedly you can

have whole facts in it. Doesn't mean it only gives you straight forward sentences but challenging core information with lovely delivering sentences. Having Running Wild in your hand like keeping the world in your arm, details in it is not ridiculous a single. We can say that no book that offer you world inside ten or fifteen minute right but this publication already do that. So , this is good reading book. Heya Mr. and Mrs. hectic do you still doubt which?

Ellis Arnold:

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