

THE WHISKEYS  
DARK KNIGHTS AT REDEMPTION RANCH

# FREEING SULLY

PREQUEL TO FOR THE LOVE OF WHISKEY

*New York Times* Bestselling Author  
**MELISSA FOSTER**

*Freeing*

**SULLY**

**Prequel to FOR THE LOVE OF WHISKEY**

**The Whiskeys**

MELISSA FOSTER

*M&F*

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## *A Note to Readers*

This is the prequel to FOR THE LOVE OF WHISKEY, detailing Sullivan “Sully” Tate’s escape from the Free Rebellion compound. I wrote Sully’s escape in 2013, and I have waited nearly a decade for the right hero to appear. The minute I met Callahan “Cowboy” Whiskey, I knew he was the only man for her. Though you don’t meet Cowboy in this prequel, you’ll meet him in FOR THE LOVE OF WHISKEY. I am thrilled to finally give Sully her happily ever after with the Whiskey family in The Whiskeys: Dark Knights at Redemption Ranch series.

If you’re interested in reading my full-length, steamy contemporary romance novels, they are all written to stand alone and may also be enjoyed as part of the larger series, so dive in and enjoy the ride.

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# SAYING GOODBYE

*BE STRONG. BE strong. Be strong.*

There were many times in Sullivan “Sully” Tate’s life when she wished someone else could be strong for her, and this was one of those times. Unfortunately, that had never been an option, so she held tight to her best friend Ansel’s hand, borrowing his strength while committing his every freckle, every lock of messy brown hair, and the intermittent twitches of the right side of his mouth to memory. The left side of his mouth had been paralyzed since birth, when he’d suffered a seizure that had also caused his left hand to be clumsy but functional. Gentle reminders that he was not as impenetrable as he portrayed himself to be.

Sully leaned her head against his narrow chest and closed her eyes. He was the closest thing to a real brother she’d ever had. How would she survive without him? *Who am I kidding? How am I going to survive at all after I escape?*

The thought was accompanied by a crushing weight.

Clinging to his hand, she took a step back, trying to push those feelings away, and peered around the trailer that shielded them from the eyes of the rest of the members of Free Rebellion. She scanned the dismal compound for what she hoped would be the last time, taking in ash-filled firepits surrounded by upturned stumps, ripped awnings, and tarps hanging over weathered wooden tables. Her gaze trailed over the worn footpaths she knew by heart, snaking through overgrown grass and dirt, between rusted and dented trailers, pop-up campers, tents, and other makeshift shacks in various

stages of deterioration, to the only stable building on the compound, where they cooked and ate meals and attended school and community meetings. Ivy and weedy vines climbed the corners and sides of the structures, making them appear as if they'd sprouted from the earth, like the tall trees that loomed around the perimeter of the compound like prison bars.

Sully reluctantly looked at the debilitated shack with the black roof at the edge of the woods. Rebel Joe's lair. The hair on the back of her neck stood on end. When she was younger, she'd longed to get inside the leader of their group's mysterious shack, where only *special* girls were allowed to go. Now that she knew what went on inside, the sight made her sick to her stomach.

She dropped Ansel's hand, wiping her sweaty palms on her skirt, and looked at the forty-plus members of the anti-establishment cult milling about. There were young adults she'd grown up with, kids she'd cared for, women she'd learned from, harvested the gardens with, cooked and sewed with, and Rebel Joe's henchmen, who barked orders and doled out harsh punishments. Sully's uncle, who had passed away a few years ago, had brought her to the compound after her mother couldn't afford to take care of her. She was too young to remember her mother, much less those early days, and Gaia, Ansel's mother, had been the closest thing to a mother she'd ever known. She'd miss Gaia, Ansel, his sister, Emina, and some of the young children she'd helped over the years, and was swamped with guilt over leaving them. But those bittersweet memories and deep-seated emotions were smothered by the cold sharpness of anger for the pain and abuse she'd endured. She'd been battling her emotions for twenty-five years and had become a master at holding them in.

She'd had to in order to survive.

"Hey, Sull, you don't have to do this." Ansel swiped his long dark bangs away from his eyes, but they flopped right back into place. "If you get caught..."

Her heart thundered at the horror in his unsaid words. This would be her third attempt at escaping the claws of the man who had claimed her as his property at ten years old, had used her body since the day she'd turned sixteen, and had enforced punishments no human should ever have to endure for her entire life. She couldn't afford to fail again.

"I can't think about that," she hissed. "If I don't leave, I'm going to do something stupid."

"So what? You always do stupid things."

He wasn't wrong, although what he thought was stupid, she felt was right. She had fought compliance to their secluded, misogynistic lifestyle for as long as she could remember. She was strong-willed and opinionated, which had earned her many punishments before she'd learned to keep her mouth shut.

"I mean *really* stupid, like stab him in his sleep."

"You'd never kill anyone."

He might be right, but her hatred for Rebel Joe ran so deep, she honestly didn't know for sure.

He must have read her thoughts, because he said, "Okay, maybe Rebel Joe, but—"

"I'm *going*, Ansel. I have to. Your mom even said so." Gaia was a midwife and had been secretly giving Sully birth control since before Rebel Joe had started using her. Last month Gaia had told her that Rebel Joe was talking about taking her to some kind of witch doctor for fertility treatments. If they found out about the birth control, she and Gaia would be severely punished, and there was no way in hell Sully was going to let that happen, much less carry that man's baby.

"Then this is really it?" Ansel whispered.

She swallowed against the lump in her throat, pretending not to notice the tears wetting his thick dark lashes, and quickly looked away, peering around the trailer again, eyeing the truck where Rebel Joe and two other men were loading



crates and trunks that would be used to retrieve supplies from Graveston, West Virginia, three hours away. It had taken seven *long* years after her second attempted escape for Sully to earn back the right to go into town with them, and it was in that industrial town where she'd make her escape. Sweat soaked the armpits of her cotton shirt despite the cool mountain air.

"Truck's pullin' out in five minutes!" Hoyt, Rebel Joe's right-hand man, hollered. He was going with them into town.

"You can change your mind," Ansel pleaded. "Tell them you're not feeling well."

"I *can't*." She embraced him, closing her eyes against a rush of tears, and focused on memorizing his earthy scent and the feel of their embrace.

"Sullivan, get out here!" Hoyt shouted.

She drew back from Ansel. "This *isn't* it. I'll see you ag—"

He put his finger on her lips. "If you make it this time, you know we'll never see each other again, and if you don't..."

"You can come—"

"*No*," he snapped in a hushed whisper. "You know I can't. I won't leave Emina." She knew he never would, and she didn't blame him, except she knew that if Rebel Joe wanted Emina, nothing would stop him from taking her.

"Sullivan!" Hoyt barked.

"I'll find a way to see you again. I promise," she whispered urgently. "I can't go the rest of my life without seeing my best friend."

Ansel dug into the pocket of his jeans and handed her a fistful of money. "It's only fourteen dollars, but at least it's something."

"Where'd you get this?" she whispered, shoving the money into the pocket of her long tan skirt. "If Rebel Joe found out you had money, you'd get in *so* much trouble." According to Rebel Joe, money created too competitive an

environment and fostered the government's desire to control everyone.

"Don't worry about me."

"Sully!" Rebel Joe's gruff shout rang out, giving her chills.

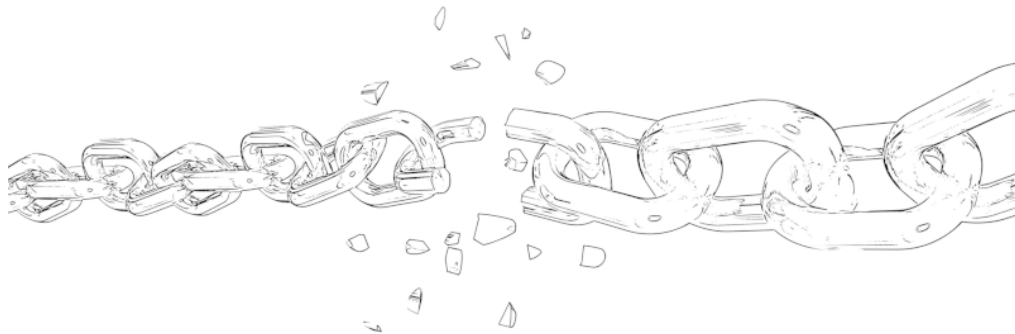
"I gotta go." She stood on her tippy-toes and kissed him on his lips for what she hoped wouldn't be the last time before hurrying toward the truck, her mounting fear swallowing her sadness.

"Sull!" Ansel yelled, his voice full of sadness.

Her stomach sank as she glanced over her shoulder. Ansel's shaggy hair blew in the breeze as he held up three fingers, their sign for *I love you* and *friend love forever*. She held up three shaky fingers and ran toward the road before her emotions could break free.

"Snap to it, Sully." Hoyt's mountainous body moved toward the truck.

She hurried over and climbed in, followed by Hoyt and Rebel Joe, who sat behind the wheel. She stole one last look as they drove away from the compound and saw Ansel standing at the corner of the trailer they'd been hiding behind, watching as she left the only life, and everyone she knew, behind.



## THE ESCAPE

SULLY NEVER REALIZED fear had a smell, until she was wedged in the cab of the truck between Rebel Joe, with his oily dark hair, pitted cheeks, and vile aura, and Hoyt, a stoic man with a scraggly beard who rarely said two words. Her legs shook as she mentally went over her plan for the millionth time. *Bathroom. Vent. Stay put. Run. Run. Run.*

“What is with you?” Rebel Joe asked. He’d dressed nicer than usual, forgoing his worn and torn jeans and grubby shirts for clean ones, as he always did when he went to town.

“Sorry. I just have to go to the bathroom.” *And never come out.*

He put his hand on her bouncing leg, stilling it.

She held her breath, afraid he’d move his hand higher and feel the money Ansel had given her. She tried inching away, hoping he’d let go, but he just gripped her leg tighter. His hand remained there until they pulled into Graveston. It took everything she had to remember to breathe. The mantra she’d been playing in her head blared on repeat. *Bathroom. Vent. Stay put. Run. Run. Run.*

Sully’s heart hammered so hard as she followed Hoyt out of the truck, she feared she might pass out. As he and Rebel Joe went around to the rear, she looked down the street toward the Mega Mart, where they would pick up food and toiletries. A few doors down she saw Frank’s Tackle Shop. They would buy their ammunition out of the back of the shop first, and

with any luck, they'd allow her to go to the Mega Mart to use the bathroom.

"Let's go, Sully." Rebel Joe nodded in the direction of the tackle shop, carrying one of their enormous supply trunks. His tone was not unkind, as he was using his public persona, which turned her stomach just as much as his gruff demands.

She stood paralyzed. This was it. Her last chance at freedom. She'd waited years for this moment, and flashes of the harsh punishments she'd endured came at her like bullets, eating away at her courage. But she couldn't let herself down, and even if they caught her trying to escape, she wouldn't go back without a fight. She forced her voice from her throat. "I have to go to the bathroom." She squeezed her knees together for good measure.

"After we get the ammo. Let's go now," he coaxed.

She gathered her courage, pleading like a teenager. "But I *really* have to go. I don't think I can wait. Can I just go into Mega Mart? I'll wait for you by the front door when I'm done." A look passed between him and Hoyt, and Sully hoped they would just let her go, but she knew her track record was a problem. Rebel Joe had a memory like a vault.

He looked at Hoyt and nodded.

Hoyt set down the crate he was carrying and crossed his arms. "I gotta waste my time with this shit?"

Rebel Joe's eyes narrowed. "We don't want our girl getting lost, now, do we?"

His words sent a shiver down Sully's back.

"You behave now, ya hear?" Rebel Joe looked at her sternly, despite his kinder tone.

"I'm just going to the bathroom." Hoping she would never see his hateful green eyes and thin lips again, she lowered her gaze to his right hand, the skin warped and mangled from a burn he'd suffered long ago, and threw in "I'm having lady troubles" for good measure.

She headed directly to the ladies' room, her hands fisting, pulse racing, with Hoyt towering silently beside her. He'd been the one to reprimand her after her last failed escape. She had seen regret in his eyes, but that hadn't stopped him from inflicting pain so great she'd passed out and had woken up with scars she'd bear until the day she died.

A guy hurried past and brushed her shoulder.

Hoyt whipped his hand out, grabbing the young man's arm so fast, Sully barely saw the movement. His stone-cold eyes locked on the poor guy, who looked terrified. "Tell the lady you're sorry."

Sully froze. *Don't hurt him. Please don't hurt him.*

"I'm sorry...really..." he stammered. "I was...*sorry.*"

"That's better." Hoyt dropped his arm, and the man practically ran from the store. "Hurry up. I'll wait here."

She pulled open the heavy door to the ladies' room, taking great satisfaction in knowing that if her escape was successful, he'd catch hell from Rebel Joe. But that thought was quickly washed away by the reality of what would happen to her if she failed.

A woman and child were washing their hands, so Sully went into a stall and waited for them to leave. The second they did, she hurried out of the stall and tilted the bathroom window open, so they'd think she escaped that way. Then she ran into the third stall. Her hands shook and her breath came in fast, hard gulps as she climbed on top of the toilet and hoisted herself up. She balanced on the metal divider between the stalls, using one hand to hold herself steady and the other to lift the ceiling tile. Pushing the tile to the side, she reached up and felt for the metal bar she'd scouted out above the third and fourth stalls, when she'd first planned her escape all those years ago. She should have escaped that day, but she hadn't said a final goodbye to Ansel, and she couldn't leave without doing so. She hadn't known another opportunity to go into town wouldn't come for years. She'd gotten tired of waiting

and had hastily tried escaping from the compound by hiding in the back of one of the trucks.

She shoved those thoughts aside and grasped the cold metal, pulling herself up into the attic. She was careful to step on the metal structure and not the other tiles as she moved the tile back into place. It was heavier from above. Tiny pieces crumbled off and fell into the toilet below. She placed the tile within its brackets, but it landed crooked just as the bathroom door opened.

Sully held her breath.

“In here, Mommy?” a child’s voice asked.

“No. That one’s dirty.” The woman flushed the toilet below Sully and guided the child into the next stall.

Taking advantage of the camouflage of the flushing toilet, Sully carefully righted the tile and crawled across the metal bars toward the far end of the building.



# FREEDOM

THE ATTIC OF the Mega Mart was hot and dark as she hurried along the metal bars on hands and toes. With her skirt bunched around her waist, she held tight to the rough metal edges, balancing on the toes of her old leather boots and using her knees when necessary. Adrenaline coursed through her as visions of Rebel Joe bursting through the ceiling flew into her mind. A jarring pain shot through her knee, and she sucked in a breath to keep from crying out. Still on all fours, she gazed down at her knee and saw a sliver of metal sticking out of her skin. Holding herself up with one hand and her feet, she bit back the pain and yanked it out, tamping the blood with the hem of her skirt.

*“Sullivan Tate, please come to the customer service counter,”* boomed from below.

She froze, paralyzed with fear, and squeezed her eyes shut. *Please don't let them find me. Please don't let them find me.* She pictured Rebel Joe, furious, acting like a concerned father—a father she knew would refuse to call the police, because even though he had connections with them, the wrong policeman showing up at the compound would put an end to his evil reign—explaining that his *daughter* was missing. That's how he referred to all the girls on the compound, despite the fact that he *used* most of them. She swallowed against the bile that rose in her throat and stayed there, frozen in place, barely breathing, balancing precariously on the metal bars, until her fingers locked up and her toes burned too

painfully to remain still. Only then did she risk crawling along the bars toward the back of the building. Her name rang out again. She was shaking from head to toe, but she forced herself to keep going.

The tile ceiling ended at the warehouse, where the rafters were exposed to the work space below. Sully made her way to the exterior wall and perched on the ridge of it, a good distance from the warehouse, so she couldn't be seen by the workers. What seemed like an hour later, but could have been more or less, she heard her name ring out over the intercom system again.

She closed her eyes, trying to calm her racing heart, but found no relief. Minutes felt like hours in the sweltering attic as she huddled along the edge of the wall. The length of time between her name booming from the intercom stretched, until finally it stopped altogether. As afternoon bled into evening, tension riddled every muscle in her body, and as night rolled in, she listened anxiously to the warehouse personnel leaving and the cleaning crew arriving. Her stomach growled, her body trembled, and her muscles ached, but she sat still as stone until the cleaning crew left and the lights went out, shrouding her in darkness.

She still didn't dare move for the longest time. When she finally inched toward the edge of the ceiling and peered into the warehouse, she could barely hear past the blood rushing through her ears as she scanned the darkness. There was no movement, no one in sight. She imagined Rebel Joe hiding like a panther waiting to pounce, and fear prickled her limbs. Outside, car engines revved and tires squealed. She barely breathed until silence billowed around her.

She peered down at the boxes below her, telling herself to be brave, and prayed she wouldn't break her leg as she moved to the edge of the ledge, contemplating the boxes. No one was coming to save her. It was now or never. She forced herself to grab the edge of a metal bar and hang from it. Her feet dangled a good distance above the boxes, and she closed her eyes and dropped, landing with a stifled *yelp*. She scrambled onto her



hands and knees and clambered off the boxes to the concrete floor. She stood there, shaking, waiting for someone to grab her, and caught sight of an exit. Hope soared within her, and she ran to the door, stopping cold at the red-and-white EMERGENCY EXIT ONLY sign across the bar. She couldn't risk setting off an alarm.

She ran out of the warehouse and into the store. Her senses heightened, and her brain played tricks on her. The air seemed to pulse around her as she sprinted to the area that had the fishing and hunting gear. She grabbed a duffel bag and stuffed gloves and long johns, a hatchet, and a few packages of freeze-dried food into it. She ran to the women's clothing area. She had never been allowed to choose things for herself. Not food or clothes or anything. Clothes were brought back to the compound for them sometimes, but mostly they wore what Sully and the other women made. She didn't know what size she wore and just took the bare necessities, hoping they would fit: a few pairs of jeans, shirts, a sweater, underwear, and socks. She quickly changed out of her bloody skirt and filthy shirt and put on a pair of jeans and a long-sleeve shirt. She stuffed her clothes into the bag and ran toward the food aisle.

As she stared at the veritable feast on the aisles before her, she had no idea what she might like, so she grabbed boxes of crackers and cereal, fresh fruit, a jar of peanut butter, a jar of jelly, and two bottles of water. As she ran toward the bathrooms, she passed the cash registers and contemplated taking money but worried the registers might have alarms and bolted into the ladies' room instead.

The window had been left slightly open. Were they stupid? Panic gripped her. Was it a trap? Was Rebel Joe waiting outside the window? She set the duffel bag down and stared up at the window. All she had to do was make it out and *run*. She grabbed the window ledge and pulled herself up until she could see outside. The parking lot was empty, and there was an open dumpster below the window. She scrambled back down and hooked the duffel bag's strap around her neck. Pulling herself up again, she braced herself on the ledge, shoved the

bag through the window, and dropped to the bathroom floor, hearing the bag land with a *thud*.

She listened for footsteps or voices but was met with silence.

After a few nerve-racking minutes, she climbed up again and peered nervously out the window. The night was still. She climbed out the tiny window, and when she dropped to the dumpster, her hair got caught and ripped out of her scalp. She bit back a cry as she scrambled to her feet, threw the bag's strap over her head and shoulder, and climbed out of the dumpster. Fear clutched her as she sprinted toward the side of the building. There was no turning back. She had to find a way out of town.

She ran down the dark, empty streets and heard the highway noises. She headed in that direction, passing a street corner with two men lying on benches. Keeping her head down and clutching the duffel, she ran faster. When she was far away from the stores, her chest aching, she jogged along the edge of the woods toward the truck stop. From the shadows of the woods, she watched every passing car, terrified Rebel Joe would catch her.

She made it to the truck stop and waited by the woods. When an eighteen-wheeler pulled out, she sprinted to the road, waving her arms. The truck flashed its lights, but she stood her ground, forcing the truck to stop. She went to the driver's side window, shaking like a leaf. A cigarette hung from the lips of a man who looked to be in his sixties, with wiry brown hair, unshaven cheeks, and heavy bags under tired eyes. Every nerve in her body burned. She had no idea if the guy was safe or not, but he had to be better than Rebel Joe. "Please, sir, can you give me a ride to the next town? My mama's sick, and I need to get home."

He looked her up and down. "You in some kinda trouble?"

"No, sir, *please*? I'll be no trouble to you at all." She shot a look down the road, knowing Rebel Joe or any of his men could drive by at any moment and remembered Ansel's

lessons about being strong. *If you act weak, you'll be weak.* She'd practiced acting brave, even when every inch of her screamed with fear, and she used those lessons now, squaring her shoulders and lifting her chin, holding the man's steady gaze. "I just need a ride to the next town."

He nodded. "Climb in."

The air rushed from her lungs. She ran around to the passenger side and climbed into the truck, breathing fast and hard. The cab smelled like cigarettes, and the floor was littered with crumpled food wrappers and empty soda cans.

She placed the duffel between them, sitting tall to act strong. "Thank you. My mama will be glad to see me."

"Mm-hm." The truck rumbled down the road.

Sully leaned her forehead against the window, watching the town fall away in the side mirror, and for the first time in...maybe *ever*, she let her shoulders begin to relax. She thought of Ansel, missing him already, and wondered if he was sitting by the fire or being questioned by Rebel Joe. They'd gone over what he would say too many times to count. She knew Ansel wouldn't cave under the pressure, but she also knew how cruel Rebel Joe's pressure could be. She rubbed the back of her neck, remembering the pain of his punishments. She couldn't go back. Not this time.

"You got a name?" the trucker asked.

"Sully," she said too quickly, wishing she'd given him a fake name.

"I'm Chester. Chester Finch." He gave her a quick once-over and glanced at the duffel bag before setting his eyes back on the road.

She realized the tags were still on the bag and on her clothes. *Darn it.*

"Whatcha runnin' from?" he asked.

"I'm not running. My mother is sick."

“Mm-hm. I’ve seen stronger girls than you runnin’ from stuff.” He stared at the road. “There ain’t no shame in runnin’.”

She didn’t know why, but running sounded weak to her. She didn’t *feel* weak, and she sure didn’t want to sound weak, so she held her head up high and said, “Yeah, well, I’m not running.” *I’m leaving.* She leaned against the window again and must have been lulled to sleep by the vibration of the truck, because she awoke several hours later, as daylight came over the horizon. “Where are we?”

“Kentucky,” the man said.

Her heart rate spiked, and she sat up, looking out at the highway. “I thought you were dropping me off at the next town.”

“Somethin’ told me you’d be better off as far away as possible from where I picked you up.”

She felt a gush of relief. The farther away from the compound, the better, even though she knew if Rebel Joe wanted to track her down, he’d find a way. But somehow being farther away magnified how very alone she was, which brought a dose of fear. She didn’t know this man or what he might do to her.

“I’m stopping here by the water for a bit. Gotta rest my eyes.” He turned off an exit and wound through several roads to a large parking area. “The water is right down there. She’s a beauty.” He nodded toward the hill. Then he rested his head back, rolled down his window, and closed his eyes.

“Can I get out and walk around?”

“Darlin’, you can do whatever you please. Just be careful.”

That made her feel a little better. He probably wasn’t going to kill her, or he would have taken her someplace secluded and not let her leave by herself. When she climbed from the truck, her entire body felt weak and achy. Patches of blood soaked the knees of her jeans, and her palms and fingers were bruised and cut. As she walked down to the water, she touched her

scalp where her hair had been ripped out, and her fingers came away with crusty blood on them. She sat in the grass, unable to believe she'd done it. She'd gotten away from Rebel Joe.

She lay back and looked up at the rising sun, breathing deeply. She was finally *free*. The thought sent a streak of memories of her last failed escape slicing into her. *If you ever try to run away again, it'll be the last time your legs work.* She closed her eyes against Rebel Joe's threat and the memory of the branding iron searing into her flesh. She'd never be truly free of him. He made sure of it.

A shadow fell over her, and she opened her eyes to find two men staring down at her. She sat up, using her heels to push backward as a sinister grin spread across the taller, gnarly looking guy's face. "Lookie what we have here."

"Ain't she a pretty one?" the thicker, bald guy said.

*Shitshitshit.* She jumped to her feet, stumbling backward as they stalked toward her.

"This riverbank is *our* place." The taller guy spit on the ground.

"I'm sorry. I didn't know."

The bald guy grabbed her arm, and fear shot through her. She kicked him in the groin, breaking free of his grasp, and bolted toward the truck, screaming, "*Help! Chester! Help!*" The other guy grabbed her ankle, and she fell face-first into the dirt.

The bald guy was on her in seconds, ripping open her jeans and tearing at his own belt as she futilely kicked, punched, and thrashed. "You're gonna pay for kicking me," he snarled, and his buddy laughed.

Gunshots rang out, sending the bald guy to his feet. She scrambled up, running toward Chester, who stood at the top of the hill, aiming a gun at the men.

"We were just having fun," one of the guys shouted.

Chester's eyes no longer looked tired. They were cold and dark as he told her to get in the truck. She ran as fast as she could and heard him holler, "You call that fun? I'll show you what fun is." Another gunshot rang out.

Sully climbed into the truck, petrified, tears streaming down her cheeks. She locked the door and pulled her knees up to her chest, curling into a ball. When Chester got back in the truck, her relief tumbled out. "*Thank you.* I was so scared."

"I got a granddaughter about your age. *Theresa.*" He set the gun on the dashboard, and for the first time, Sully noticed a wedding ring on his left hand. He set a serious stare on her. "Now, are you gonna level with me and tell me what you're runnin' from, or do I gotta follow you around till I figure it out?"

Sully opened her mouth to lie again, but he cut her off.

"Cause I could no sooner leave you to fend for yourself than I could turn my back on my sweet Theresa."

She was afraid to tell him the truth. What if he was one of Rebel Joe's connections she'd heard about?

"Well, if that's how you wanna be, then so be it." He closed his eyes and leaned his head back.

Guilt tugged at her. The man had saved her life, and she couldn't be honest with him? "I'm just starting over," she said quietly.

He opened one eye and looked at her.

"I'm not really running away as much as I'm running toward something else."

He nodded. "Toward...?"

She shrugged. "Anything better."

"Well, young lady, that's a start."

"That's about all there is, I'm afraid." Her stomach growled.

“Hungry?”

“I have food.” She unzipped the duffel bag, showing him the food she’d taken.

“What’d you do, rob a store?”

“No, sir.”

He pursed his lips and lifted his eyebrows.

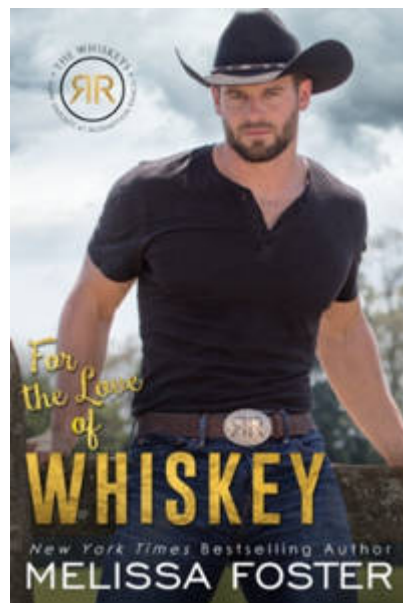
“I didn’t really steal it. I borrowed it.” This was not who she wanted to be. She didn’t like liars. “I took it,” she relented. “I’m sorry. I know I shouldn’t have.”

“Well, I can’t have you thievin’ while you’re with me. No more of that *borrowing*, you hear?”

“Yes, sir. I’ve never stolen anything before. Honest.” Rebel Joe’s voice trampled through her head. *I own you, Sully. Your life is mine.* She swallowed hard, realizing she’d unknowingly lied to Chester again. She’d stolen her own life from the hands of an evil man—and she’d do it again if she had to.



I hope you enjoyed reading about Sully’s escape from the Free Rebellion. To follow her journey to her happily ever after, pick up FOR THE LOVE OF WHISKEY (The Whiskeys: Dark Knights at Redemption Ranch).



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*Please Note: You might also enjoy reading [THEN CAME LOVE](#) (The Bradens & Montgomerys) featuring Sully's sister, Jordan Lawler, and Jax Braden. Jordan's story takes place during the same time period as Sully's escape, prior to *FOR THE LOVE OF WHISKEY*.*



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## Meet Melissa



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Melissa Foster is a *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, and *USA Today* bestselling and award-winning author. Her books have been recommended by *USA Today*'s book blog, *Hagerstown* magazine, *The Patriot*, and several other print venues. Melissa has painted and donated several murals to the Hospital for Sick Children in Washington, DC.

Visit Melissa on her website or chat with her on social media. Melissa enjoys discussing her books with book clubs and reader groups and welcomes an invitation to your event. Melissa's books are available through most online retailers in paperback, digital, and audio formats.

Melissa also writes sweet romance with no explicit scenes or harsh language under the pen name Addison Cole.