



THE
**IMPOSSIBLE
MISSION**
SERIES

MISSION:

impossible to

PROTECT

USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR
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About the Book

She's a nerd turned ninja...

Working as a top-secret biochemist, Danni Knorr was kidnapped and almost killed by terrorists who wanted her research. After narrowly escaping with her life, she vowed never to be a victim again. To confront her fears, Danni becomes the kind of woman no one dare mess with, learning martial arts and firearms. She's traded in her lab coat for a holster, working as a kickass personal bodyguard for a famous rock star. But she's in way over her head when she stumbles onto drug cartel business—business that could get her killed.

He's a bad boy hiding a broken heart...

Lars Jenkins is the Spec. Ops Marine rescued Danni when she was kidnapped. In the months that have passed since then, he can't get her out of his head. While she's hot as hell, she is trouble with a capital T. The woman attracts danger like a magnet—a sexy magnet, which is why Lars stays away from her. He was hurt once and won't allow it to happen again. But when a friend calls in a favor, Lars finds himself helping Danni once more and the chemistry between them is more explosive than ever.

Stuck together again, the two decide maybe mixing pleasure with business isn't the worst thing that could happen. The worst thing would be getting killed by the drug cartel hunting them.

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Mission: Impossible to Resist excerpt

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A Code of Wonder excerpt

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Chapter One

Hugging the backstage wall, Danni Knorr crept in the shadows with her SIG tucked into her skirt and a flashlight in her hand. The only light in the wings came from the red exit sign. The band's frenetic sound matched her heartbeat as it raced to its own crazy-ass rhythm. Espionage beat the hell out of spending the day in a biochemistry/physics lab. Undercover as rock star Alex Hardy's girlfriend/bodyguard, she had discovered a new high. Like drinking expensive French champagne, she got off on danger.

This was a new thing. Before she'd been kidnapped, Danni had never thought about her body more than keeping it in shape and healthy. Had never thought of holding a gun, let alone buying one and practicing with targets weekly. Had never realized just how many threats were out there and how little she'd been able to do to save herself.

Honing her body into a fighting machine with Krav Maga had been her first step to taking charge after she had been kidnapped. Then she'd taken classes on tactical awareness. She'd read up on the FBI and various police trainings. She'd even thought about joining the Jenkins Security agency, but Nick Jenkins had turned her down because of her lack of experience. At least he'd been honest with her.

The last step in her "recovery" was to take ownership of her pleasure. Sex with the famous superstud Alex Hardy was to be the ultimate statement of her proclaimed freedom. She hadn't yet made up her mind whether she should seduce him.

Right now, acting only as his bodyguard suited her perfectly. Her idea to guard the musician after discovering that he was being stalked had been serendipitous. A year ago, when Jax the Jerk, her ex-fiancé, had left her at the altar for a teenager with more enthusiasm and experience with sex than she had—or so he'd been happy to tell her—Danni had been unable to bite the bullet and seduce any guy. Since then, there was only one man who'd tempted her to open up and be vulnerable as well as passionate, and sadly, it wasn't Alex, no matter how much she tried to persuade herself to give him a chance.

Danni stopped and hid against the black concrete wall, searching for the location of the backstage crew before she went into the greenroom. She could easily bullshit about why she was wandering backstage, away from

Alex's performance, but she'd rather not draw attention to herself. And she preferred to avoid creepy Frank, Alex's childhood friend and head of security.

The murmur of the crew's voices could be heard outside the stage door where they took their breaks to vape cancer. They had twenty minutes of downtime before the next scene change, allowing Danni less than fifteen minutes to search the belongings of the band and the traveling staff before the backstage crew would be back at work, and the band would take their break in the greenroom.

She knew she was grasping at straws trying to connect the band and staff to Alex's stalker. But Danni was determined to find how the stalker had accessed Alex's dressing room to leave the third threatening letter at the last concert in Portland.

Posing as Alex's girlfriend, she had flown to every city for the last four weeks to hang with the band and the groupies and have her picture taken with Alex. She had declined traveling in the almost all-male—except for Luna, the drummer's girlfriend and the band's massage therapist—tour bus, no matter how luxurious their RVs were.

Six cities and all their fake PDA, hoping to bait the stalker to reveal herself, and they had nothing except for another letter. Danni was no further along, with not one lead on how the stalker had breached Alex's dressing room in Portland.

She slowly opened the door to make sure that the greenroom was clear of the catering staff or aggressive groupies.

Despite the name, the room where the band members hung out during breaks and before the show wasn't green. As the headliner, Alex had his own dressing room. The greenroom in LA was no different from any of the other performers' backstage rooms she'd seen the past months.

She decided to snoop without Alex's knowledge. He was too close to his band and would never believe that one of them could be the stalker. And he most likely was right since there was a ridiculously low probability. But the band and traveling staff all had access to Alex's dressing room, and they were the only consistent factor since the backstage crews changed in every city. She needed to be absolutely sure that the stalker wasn't a disgruntled band or traveling staff member.

Guitar cases, gym bags, and backpacks were scattered across the worn industrial carpet. Being on tour wasn't as cool as everyone imagined. It was

exhausting, with boring hours of tedious downtime for the two-to-three-hour high of performance. But, like her newly found danger addiction, performing was a high that fed on itself.

A half-open leather backpack was propped haphazardly against a guitar case. She knew exactly which mess belonged to which member, making it easy to start—Roland Young, drug addict and the lead guitarist, made the top on her list. She didn't have a clear connection between his addiction and stalking Alex, but he was the only member who raised red flags.

She hurried across the nondescript room, which was painted purple to create an edgy feel in the utilitarian square space. Kneeling next to the beat-up leather backpack, she began a methodical search. She didn't know what she might find, but she trusted her instincts to recognize a clue.

Her hands shook as the adrenaline surged through her body—part of the thrill of the hormonal rollercoaster. Maybe she had read too many Nancy Drew novels as a young girl.

She went through each pocket—a row of condoms, spiking hair gel, a bag of Reese's Peanut Butter Cups. Pretty dull findings. Despite being a junky with an oversized ego, nothing suspicious linked Roland to the stalker or even revealed obvious drug paraphernalia.

The center of the pack held deodorant, and two rolled-up T-shirts that he'd change into at the breaks in the set. She shook out both—nada.

She scooted over to Roland's guitar case and unlatched it. Besides being illegal, this was a ridiculous waste of time.

Danni stopped in response to a possible sound from the hallway. Her heart jolted at the fear of being discovered. She turned quickly to the crew's side door, where she had just entered. She strained to hear whether anyone was approaching. Part of the downside of the adrenaline rush was it made you hyperalert and a bit overreactive. A possible advantage when your life was in danger. Not great when you're just snooping and needed to remain undetected.

When no one appeared, she rifled through Roland's case. Nothing but extra sets of strings and picks. Although Roland was a slob, he took good care of his guitars.

She methodically went through everyone else's gear with no findings. Checking her phone, she realized she better hurry back to Alex's dressing room to make sure there were no surprises waiting for him during his break. She now checked Alex's room before he returned between sets.

Danni was hurrying back toward Alex's room when the dressing room door opened. She stepped to the side of a giant speaker to watch who was leaving the room. The only person with a credible reason to be in Alex's room at this point in the show was the wardrobe person.

Her skin tingled as she watched creepy Frank look both ways before he silently closed the door. Why was Frank in Alex's room? As head of security, he was supposed to verify that the guards were in place to prevent anyone from sneaking backstage during the intermission.

Danni's pulse sped as Frank headed toward her hiding place. She held her breath and squeezed into the narrow space behind the speaker. The crowd's shouts for more when the set ended was background noise to her fast-beating heart reverberating in her eardrums. Instead of holding her breath while smashed against the wall, she could have pretended she was returning to Alex's room. Except this wasn't the way that she would have come.

She was glad that she didn't wear heavy perfume since Frank strolled right past her without noticing. She wiggled out of her hiding spot and headed to Alex's room. Could Frank be the stalker?

Her brain went into hyperdrive. Despite not liking the way Frank stared at her, she couldn't think of one reason for Frank to sabotage Alex. The man was supposedly his friend and provided Frank's income. How did Alex ending his tour early benefit Frank? She needed to find out. Lucky Reeves Hewitt, IT wizard for Jenkins Security, was her bestie.

All this skulking around gave her a little thrill, but nothing like those Jenkins boys and their friends. And even though her plans to sleep with Alex had gone by the wayside, she still wanted to prove her strength and smarts. People might focus on her looks, but she knew where her true power lay. And taking down this stalker would fulfill her real desire—to prove just how kick-ass and capable she was. Then maybe it would be time to join Jenkins Security. Or maybe the FBI...

Chapter Two

Lars Jenkins followed closed behind Reeves Hewitt, who pressed into the crowd at the loud brewery. The local spot was packed with Seattleites in the usual laid-back Pacific Northwest uniform of T-shirts, jeans, and runners. This was a scene that he usually enjoyed, but tonight the noise and the jammed space grated on his nerves. His throbbing leg after his grueling workout didn't help. All he wanted was to put his leg up, chill, and forget.

Why the hell did he allow himself to be talked into barhopping on a Thursday night? Because Reeves, the IT specialist at his family's security firm, had insisted that he had something important to share that couldn't be discussed at the office. So, Lars dragged himself out. He was in bad shape if he preferred staying home working on his next project while he had downtime rather than body pressing with hot women.

His recent gunshot hadn't come close to the groin, but somehow his boys didn't seem to be sending out the right hormones. He'd had nada interest in getting laid ever since a mouthy blonde sat by his bedside, holding his hand before and after the surgery to remove the bullet from his quad muscle.

Reeves headed down a dark hallway to the back room where the music wasn't blaring, and the crowd thinned. The smaller wood-paneled space was a relief.

Lars found a seat in the corner and placed his beer on the table. "What's so important that you couldn't tell me at work?" He pulled a stool up and sat facing the door, a habit deeply ingrained from his covert work.

He wasn't a masochist. He'd get back in the game once he was able to move his thigh fully. The damn bullet had torn up the lateral side of his quad. He was fortunate the bullet didn't hit his femoral artery, or he wouldn't be enjoying the robust flavor of the heavy lager. Another day that he dodged the final bullet.

"You need to get out and stop pitying yourself. You know that, right?" Reeves sat across from him.

"What the fuck, Reeves? You some sort of babysitter? Did Sten sic you on me?"

Another reason Lars wasn't up for company. He missed sparring with his twin. Sten was now stationed in DC. Lars would never admit, even

under the threat of torture, that he missed his brother during his downtime.

“No, Sten doesn’t know how you’ve been moping around the office.”

“How am I supposed to be acting? Instead of being with my team at Pendleton, I’m babysitting Jenkins Security while Nick is off in Hawaii playing with Emily. And have you forgotten that I just got out of the damn hospital? I’m busting my ass doing intensive physical therapy, in addition to running the training program for Nick’s marine buddies.”

Reeves clinked his glass with Lars’s. “Drink up.”

Lars threw back the lager then placed the half-empty glass on the table.

“You happy? Now tell me before I have to demonstrate my skills as the almost youngest of the five Jenkins brothers.” Sten was two minutes younger.

“I’m immune to the usual Jenkins threats.” Reeves raised his hands.

“You must promise that you won’t tell her that I spilled everything. You’re going to need a good cover story.”

“What the hell are you talking about?”

“Danni, of course.” Reeves took a gulp of his beer. “She’s in trouble.”

Lars’s heart rate, and his brain, tore into double time. Danni, the woman of every one of his fantasies, who had never left the hospital during his six-day admission. She’d felt responsible for his injury and did everything to comfort him through the miserable post-op days.

And when he was set to be discharged and ready to pursue the burning connection between them, she’d disappeared. Not even a fucking goodbye after her Florence Nightingale stint. She had returned to her rock star boyfriend.

“Well, she’s not in trouble yet, but she’s headed that way. She is going to be pissed if she thinks I contacted you because I didn’t think she could handle the situation. You know what she’s like. Since she was kidnapped, she’s been hellbent on proving how tough she is. Remember how she offered herself up as bait to protect Sophie from the terrorist? And thank God, Nick was able to stop her from getting involved when the Chinese came after Emily.”

Lars tried for patience while Reeves meandered down his usual circuitous route, but this was Danni. Lars sat forward, elbows on the table, and glared. “What kind of trouble can she possibly get into while she’s with her famous boyfriend?”

“That’s the other interesting part. I don’t think Hardy is her boyfriend.”

Lars's heart thumped against his chest, and his palms started to sweat. He wiped his hands on his jeans. God, Reeves was driving him crazy. "I'm going to put my fist into your face if you don't explain what the fuck you're talking about."

"Danni told me she's Hardy's bodyguard."

"What?"

"Danni called me late last night. She wanted me to run a check on Hardy's head of security."

Lars stared at Reeves's mouth. Words were coming out, but Lars couldn't comprehend them. Alex Hardy might not be her boyfriend. Maybe the explosive chemistry that Lars thought was one-sided might be mutual.

Lars threw back the rest of his beer. He didn't want to sound desperate. "You're telling me that after all this time, Danni isn't hooking up with Hardy?"

He should've asked why Reeves thought Danni might be in trouble first. "Never mind. Her love life isn't relevant. What has Danni gotten herself into this time?"

"Not relevant?" Reeves rolled his dark eyes. "Man, you basically drool when she's close by."

"Every man drools around Danni. She's gorgeous, and her ballbuster attitude makes men sit up and notice."

"True." Reeves smirked. "I'm glad to see her having a good time. She deserves it."

That was part of the problem. Danni enjoyed playing men. She had the Jenkins brothers, especially Lars, in her crosshairs. It was all a game to her. She was adamant that she didn't do relationships, only meaningless sex. She enjoyed her life as a single woman making choices. And she had choices in spades. She had a legendary rock star drooling at her heels. But if she wasn't with Hardy, maybe he had a chance.

"Is this some sort of punk that my brothers put you up to?" His brothers all knew he had a thing for Danni and that she had turned him down so many times he'd lost count. What man wouldn't want a one-night stand with the gorgeous woman? Two problems, though. One, she was close to his siblings and friends, and he didn't want to screw up any future interactions. And two, well, Lars refused to dig into the feeling that he wasn't up for meaningless sex with the woman of his fantasies.

“You can’t tell your brothers.” Reeves ran his hand through his hair. “It’s bad enough that I’m telling you.”

“When Hardy was in Seattle, he had at least three men guarding him. Why does he need Danni?”

“All I know is that Hardy has a stalker who has been sending threatening letters. He asked Danni to be his personal bodyguard.”

Yeah, sure. Like Hardy really needed a beautiful woman to guard him. “Personal” was the part Hardy wanted.

“Danni is taking her role as Hardy’s bodyguard very seriously, which worries me. She has searched the belongings of the band and crew, hoping to find a link between them and the stalker.”

What was the woman’s problem? She couldn’t just go around prying into people’s stuff.

“She’s going to get arrested or get herself killed. Why would Hardy put her in danger?” Lars never liked Hardy, but now he had a good reason to hurt the guy.

“Maybe Hardy wants to keep Danni close by, so he hired her to guard him.” Reeves raised his thick brows.

“Wait, you think Hardy made up a stalker to have Danni in his life?”

Lars could almost sympathize with Hardy for wanting to keep Danni. She was outrageous, loyal to a fault, brilliant, and vulnerable. No matter how hard she tried to sell how tough she was, she was all soft and warm, as he’d discovered during her bedside vigil.

If Lars ever had Danni in his bed, he’d probably be desperate to keep her there too. Another reason he should stay clear of the woman. She was his kryptonite. And he didn’t like how desperate she could make him with her practiced flick of her hair, the sexy way she crossed her legs, and her smart-ass comebacks. She enjoyed tormenting him. Lars fantasized about getting a chance to torment her in the best way possible. And then maybe his need for this one woman would be finished and he could finally move on.

“Can’t you see her wanting to find the stalker and rescue Hardy? You know she has a bleeding heart.”

“Even for you, this is too farfetched. Hardy is a solid guy.” Lars had run a deep security check on Hardy, and the guy was sparkling clean. He donated millions to his refugee program and cared about the environment. The guy was almost too good to be true. Despite his jealousy, Lars had no

reason to believe Hardy would manufacture a stalker. Hell, Hardy had passed Richard Dean's scrutiny when he'd been hanging out with his younger daughter, Sophie. And the software billionaire was notoriously suspicious about anyone who came close to his daughters.

Lars threw back the dregs on the bottom of his glass. He needed another beer, or maybe five. "She drives me nuts. She doesn't have the skills to be a bodyguard. Dammit, she's a scientist."

"Since her kidnapping, she has been focused on learning Krav Maga. And she is now licensed to carry. Nick helped her find the right instructors and made it all happen. She's considering joining the FBI. With her smarts and scientific background, I'm sure they'll be interested, at least."

"What the hell? Nick never told me." Lars couldn't possibly be jealous of his oldest brother, could he?

"Why couldn't she be like other women and just take a damn self-defense class? Not that any of the women my brothers are involved with would ask for a man's protection. And they're all friends with Danni." Dammit, why did he care so much about everything she did?

"Because she is highly capable and driven to succeed at everything she does. She has a lot to live up to. If you met her mother, you'd understand. Both her parents are professors at Harvard, and her brother is an aerospace brain at NASA."

Lars ran his hand through his hair, not used to the longer length. His military "high and tight" cut had grown out with his medical leave. His mood darkened with the idea he knew nothing about her family and that he had never had a serious conversation with her. Which was weird; since when did he want to have a conversation with a beautiful woman?

"It doesn't matter how many classes she's taken; she would have been killed if I hadn't been there to protect her when the fucking terrorist had her in his sights."

Lars appreciated how Danni had kept her cool despite the lethal threat and how she had reacted with force. She had proven herself very competent several times in hairy circumstances, but he never wanted her tested again in a shootout. He would never forget that he'd come close to losing her. It didn't matter how good your skills were; bad things happened even to experienced operators.

"I couldn't ask her a lot of questions since I didn't want her to get suspicious about our concerns. And, bottom line, she wasn't willing to give

a lot away, knowing I might tell her besties Jordan or Sophie, and then they might tell Aiden and Finn. If she knew that I was squealing on her... That's why I need you to go down there and figure it out. You need to stop Danni from getting herself shot at again. Stalkers can be extremely unstable and dangerous."

"And why is this my problem?"

Reeves rolled his eyes. "Right."

"Danni will never accept my help."

"You're right. She won't." Reeves grinned.

And why did Danni's stubborn resistance make him happy for the first time since she left him?

"That's why I've come up with the perfect cover. You're having lunch with Sophie tomorrow."

Jenkins Security's main client was billionaire Richard Dean and his two daughters, Jordan and Sophie. Richard's uncle had started the security company when he became guardian to his nephews after his younger brother had been killed in action.

"You can suggest that you both head to LA for the weekend. Sophie is so bored while Finn is deployed, she'll jump at the chance. And if you don't get out of the office, I'm going to have to shoot you."

Lars leaned against the wall. Reeves's plan had merits...but what if he got down there and found Hardy and Danni were together? He was a spec ops marine—he could handle the pain. And maybe if he saw Danni with Hardy, he'd finally be over the woman. Finally give up on the challenge this woman represented.

"I can't exactly say, 'Hey, Soph, want to head to LA to see Danni?' Soph is no slouch; she'll know somethings up."

"If you tell Sophie that you need to interview a new recruit in LA for the business, you could ask her if she would want to tag along since it would give her a chance to spend time with Danni."

"Finn will kick my ass when he hears that I took Sophie to Hardy's concert. Hardy had a thing for Sophie. Finn won't like me taking her to LA to spend time with Hardy while Finn's in Somalia or God knows where." His brother, a SEAL, was on his last deployment.

Reeves shrugged. "Finn trusts Sophie. He'll be happy that she's with Danni."

“Are you sure about the part about Danni? Those two women are known as troublemakers for damn good reasons.”

“That’s why I don’t think you should share anything with Sophie about the stalker... If Sophie is in danger, Finn will kick both of our asses.”