

POINT OF NO RETURN

Also by Tiffany Snow
No Turning Back, The Kathleen Turner Series
Turn to Me, The Kathleen Turner Series
Turning Point, The Kathleen Turner Series
Out of Turn, The Kathleen Turner Series
Turn on a Dime—Blane's Turn
Blank Slate

POINT OF NO RETURN

Book Five in The Kathleen Turner Series

Tiffany Snow



For Maria, my amazing editor.
This book is better because of you.

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PROLOGUE

I hated hospitals. Sickness and death. Grief and worry. The endless antiseptic corridors of a hospital were filled with them.

Which was why I was standing in the maternity ward, gazing at the newborn babies through the window.

It was the middle of the night or really early in the morning, depending on your point of view. Since I hadn't gone to sleep yet, I guess it felt more like the former than the latter.

It had been only a bit over twenty-four hours since my world had nearly ended.

Since Kade had almost died.

Kade Dennon. Ex-FBI agent, assassin-for-hire, cyber hacker with no fear of ever getting caught. He'd seemed larger than life. Unstoppable. Then he'd stepped into the path of a bullet to save his brother.

A few inches higher and it would have been the last thing he did.

The babies swam in my vision and I gasped for air, just then realizing I'd been holding my breath. My nails cut into my palms as I clenched my hands into fists. Holding myself together was getting harder and harder the longer Kade was unconscious.

I'd left the hospital earlier today for a few short hours. Mona had made me. A surrogate mother to Kade, she'd taken me under her wing as well, making me go home to change and eat something.

I hadn't wanted to take off the bloodstained bridesmaid's dress I'd worn. It was stained with Kade's blood, and I felt an irrational fear that taking it off would make it seem as though I'd forgotten about him.

But I forced myself to put the dress carefully aside, shower, and pull on fresh clothes. I wasn't sure what—I just grabbed the first thing I touched when I opened my closet. Eating was out of the question. If I'd had any food in my fridge, which I didn't, there was no way I could've eaten it. My stomach was cramped in knots, and the thought of trying to get something down made me nauseous. All that mattered was getting back to the hospital. Back to Kade.

It was surreal, the people I passed as I drove back to the hospital. Everyone acted as though life were normal. My world had fallen apart, but the sun still shone like it was any other day.

Mona frowned when she saw me return so quickly. I gave her a wan smile and she sighed.

"He's going to be okay," she tried to reassure me. "The doctor said he'll recover. Trust them, Kathleen."

That's me. Kathleen Turner. It had nearly been Kathleen Kirk until my fiancé, Blane Kirk, had broken our engagement. He'd accused me of having an affair with his brother. His brother being Kade.

Blane Kirk was a Navy SEAL turned attorney and politician. He was an expert at reading people, and it was nearly impossible to lie to him. Blane's accusation and

our subsequent breakup had broken my heart. He'd been wrong about Kade and me. We hadn't been having an affair . . . then.

Now, I wasn't so sure.

Kade had swept back into my life months after Blane and I broke up. He'd taken me to Las Vegas, shown me the town, partied with me Vegas-style. Then he'd made love to me. Told me he loved me. I hadn't realized until later that I was in love with him, too.

Now he lay unconscious in a hospital bed with two gunshot wounds, and he had no idea how I felt. Because I hadn't told him. Afraid it would only drive Blane and Kade further apart, I'd pretended to feel nothing, to want Blane only for his money and Kade for sex, practically daring them to hate me.

I'd prayed it would be enough to repair their relationship, broken because of me, and I had nearly succeeded. If Blane had been less intuitive, if both of them hadn't known me as well as they had, it might've worked. But they'd seen through my lies, my desperate gamble to remove myself from their lives.

I didn't know where things stood now, not really. A grief-stricken father had precluded any discussion, and Kade had stepped in front of a bullet intended for Blane, sacrificing himself for his brother without a second's hesitation.

Yes, they said Kade would recover, that he had made it through surgery okay, but that didn't relieve the guilt gnawing at me for how I'd treated him. And until he opened his eyes—until I could see for myself that he was still the Kade I knew—I could think of nothing else, *do* nothing else.

Blane and I sat through the day at Kade's bedside. We watched as they removed the ventilator, our hands tightly connected as we saw Kade's chest rise and fall on its own. We took turns running home, at Mona's behest, to change. Occasionally, one of us would take a break, leaving the other to keep vigil for a short time.

Which was how I found myself standing in the maternity ward staring at the babies.

One of them, a little boy, by the pale blue cap on his head, was fussing. Somehow he'd gotten his arms free from the blanket swaddling him, and his tiny hands were curled into fists as he cried.

A nurse walked over to him, scooping him up in her arms and settling him on her shoulder. She wandered closer to the glass as she shushed him. When she turned her back, I could see he'd quieted. He was wide-awake, his blue eyes open and taking in the world around him. He was beautiful, perfect, and it seemed as though our gazes met through the glass as he began sucking on his fist.

Pulling myself from my reverie, I glanced at my watch, surprised to see I'd been gone from Kade's room longer than I'd intended. Blane was probably wondering where I was.

Hurrying back, I was both relieved and disappointed to see that Kade was still unconscious. They wanted him to wake up on his own and I prayed that would be soon. The pain medication they had him on was heavy-duty.

Blane had fallen asleep in the corner armchair while I'd been gone, but even in sleep, his face was creased with lines of worry.

I sank into the plastic chair drawn up next to Kade's bed. His lax hand rested on top of the sheet covering him. I curled my palm into his, carefully scrutinizing his face for any reaction.

His hair was inky black against the stark white pillow, the silky strands mussed. Reaching forward, I pushed back a lock that had fallen across his forehead. My fingers brushed his cheek, the stubble from two days' growth softly abrading my skin. I ached for his eyes to open, to hear his voice, for his lips to curve into that knowing smirk I knew so well—the kind that said he knew exactly what you were thinking. And it seemed he had always known what I was thinking, had always been looking out for me, from the moment we'd first met.

Carefully, I rested my head on Kade's arm, savoring the feel of his warm skin against my cheek. I closed my eyes and breathed in. Kade's scent was faint, the smell of medicine and antiseptic masking him. I let out a long sigh. I wished I could sleep—I was so tired—but I knew I wouldn't.

Kade's fingers twitched slightly in mine and I sat up with a start, my gaze flying to his face. His eyes were open, his gaze steady.

Emotion clogged my throat and I couldn't speak, my face crumpling into tears.

Kade's hand slowly lifted to my face. I covered his hand with mine, tipping my head into his palm cradling my cheek.

"Don't cry," he whispered. The ventilator had been rough on his throat and his voice was a low rasp.

Kade had always hated to see me cry, so I tried valiantly to stop. Turning my head, I pressed my lips to his palm, then forced a watery smile.

He opened his mouth again, but I pressed a finger to his lips. “Shhh. Don’t try to talk.”

He ignored me. Big surprise.

“C’mere,” he said, the word barely audible. He tugged on my hand.

“I can’t,” I said, wondering if the pain medicine was making him a little loopy. “I’ll hurt you.”

“Bullshit. Need you.”

Kade tugged again and this time tried to sit up, too. A grimace crossed his face. Alarmed, I put my hand on his shoulder to still him.

“Okay, okay,” I said quietly. “Just lie down, all right?”

He lay back down on the bed with a sigh. I kicked off my flip-flops and climbed into the bed, carefully arranging myself on my side and trying not to disturb any of the equipment still hooked up to him. Kade wrapped one arm over my shoulders and pulled me closer.

It was him. He was alive, and judging by how he was already bossing me around, he was the same Kade. And despite everything I’d said—all those things that had hurt him—he still wanted me. Everything was going to be okay. Somehow.

Kade’s lips pressed against my forehead. I looked up at him. His blue eyes were clear as he studied me.

“I love you,” I whispered. “I’m sorry that I didn’t tell you before. But I do. I love you.”

Kade didn’t react for a moment, and I was suddenly afraid that he hadn’t understood—that the pain medication and being unconscious for so long had made him too groggy. But then he spoke, his words a low rasp in my ear.

“You would have to tell me that when I’m laid up in the fucking hospital,” he said.

I huffed an unexpected laugh, and his soft smile made my heart feel lighter than it had in weeks. My whole body relaxed into him and my eyelids drooped. God, I was so tired . . .



Blane Kirk watched the scene from the shadows in the corner. He’d woken when Kat had settled into the chair by Kade, but had remained quiet. His heart had leapt when he saw Kade’s eyes open, relief flooding him. Kade was okay, was going to recover.

Blane couldn’t have lived with himself if his kid brother had died while saving his life.

The whispered words that Kat and Kade spoke had traveled across the room to Blane. Hearing Kat tell Kade she loved him had been like a hot knife sliding between Blane’s ribs, even though he’d known for far longer than she had.

Where did the three of them go from here? Blane couldn’t say. All he knew was that he loved Kade and Kathleen beyond anyone and anything else—and he’d do whatever he had to in order to see them both happy. If that cost him Kat forever, so be it, but he wasn’t going to give up until he heard it from her own mouth that they were over. She loved Kade, but she loved him, too, which meant he still had a chance.

Blane could tell that Kat had fallen asleep, her body relaxed as she lay tucked next to Kade. Fiddling with the bed controls, Kade eased the bed up slightly so they weren’t lying flat, but Kat didn’t stir. Blane was glad she was asleep.

She'd been awake for nearly forty-eight hours straight, almost dead on her feet from sheer exhaustion. Dark circles marred the delicate skin underneath her eyes, and her face was drawn and pale. The only thing Blane had seen her consume was coffee.

Not once had she blamed him, or had even hinted that she knew the whole reason Kade had nearly died was because of him. But then again, it wasn't in her character to think that way. If only Blane had realized that months ago. So many what-ifs . . .

What if Blane hadn't been so jealous of what he'd so clearly seen between Kade and Kathleen . . . If he hadn't listened to his uncle . . . If he had believed Kat instead of Robert . . . If he hadn't given in to old habits, using Kandi in a way that left him feeling ashamed now . . . If he hadn't been so angry that night, the night after he'd realized Kade and Kat were in Vegas together, sleeping together . . .

The *what-ifs* could paralyze him with regret.

Kade was stroking Kat's hair now, his fingers combing slowly through the long, strawberry-blonde locks. His expression was rapt as he gazed down at her, and if Blane had had any doubts as to the depth of Kade's feelings for Kat, they would have been washed away in that single, unguarded moment.

Suddenly, Blane felt like an intruder. The naked adoration on his brother's face was something private. Kade wouldn't appreciate that Blane was spying on them, even if it was unintentional.

Blane closed his eyes, then gave a big sigh and yawn. He stretched before opening his eyes again. As he'd expected,

Kade's expression had shuttered, his gaze now on Blane rather than Kat.

Rising from the chair, Blane rubbed an imaginary crick in his neck as he walked toward the bed. It didn't escape his notice that Kade seemed to instinctively draw Kat closer, as if to claim her as his.

"You're awake," he said softly, so as to not disturb Kat. "How're you feeling?"

"Like I got shot," Kade deadpanned.

"That tends to happen when you get in the way of bullets."

Kade's lips twitched.

"Thought I was going to have to wake your ass up myself," Blane said. "She wasn't going to make it much longer if you didn't." He nodded toward Kat, who slept on, oblivious to the conversation taking place.

Kade glanced back down at her, his face softening.

"She's one tough chick," he whispered, brushing his knuckles gently down her cheek.

"In some ways," Blane agreed "In some ways not."

Kade looked back to Blane, who met his gaze.

"Are we going to do this now, brother?" Kade asked, his voice deceptively smooth, though Blane could see a flicker of fear in his eyes. Kade's hold tightened on Kathleen, as though he was afraid that Blane would take her from him.

"You mean talk about the elephant in the room?" Blane said dryly, cocking an eyebrow.

"She'd get pretty pissed off if she heard you call her an elephant."

Blane grinned. Kade never failed to amuse him, even when they were talking about something so serious. For a

moment he just reveled in the knowledge that Kade was alive, was going to be fine. Thank God.

Blane couldn't help reaching out, his fingers lightly grasping Kat's lax hand. She didn't stir. Kade's eyes narrowed, but he didn't protest Blane's touch. It seemed as though each of them wanted to mark her as his.

"She told me she loves you," Blane admitted, "and me. What that means, I have no idea. But we can talk about that later. For now I just want you to get better."

Kade's grip on Kathleen loosened, just a fraction.

Blane pretended not to notice, though his gut twisted. Too many mistakes and, eventually, you couldn't go back. He vowed not to make any more.

Blane glanced at his watch. "It's late, and I'm beat," he said with forced nonchalance. "Since you've reasserted your presence among the living and coherent, I'm going home to get some shut-eye. I'll be back in the morning."

"Sounds good," Kade said, resting his head against the pillow. His eyes slipped closed.

Blane turned away and headed for the door. Pulling it open, he glanced back one more time.

The dim lights cast a faded, golden glow over Kade and Kat. He'd resumed stroking her hair and she still hadn't moved.

"Kade," Blane said.

He glanced up.

"Thank you. For saving my life."

The ghost of a smile flitted across Kade's lips. "The least I could do," he said. "You saved mine first, remember?"

Blane shook his head sadly. "No, I didn't. Not really." He paused. "But she may have." His gaze fell on Kat as Kade's

brow furrowed, then he turned and left, quietly closing the door behind him.



Sunlight streaming in through the window woke me in the morning. I squinted, and it took a moment for my sleep-fogged brain to realize where I was and who I was with.

Kade.

He'd finally regained consciousness last night, and now I lay curled into him, his arm slung over my shoulders and mine draped low across his abdomen. The heart monitor beat a quiet, reassuring rhythm while the IV hooked to Kade's left arm steadily dripped its fluid down the plastic tubing.

His eyes were closed, the evenness of his breathing signaling that he was sound asleep. I dearly wanted to wake him, see his eyes and hear his voice again, but I resisted the temptation. I knew he needed to rest.

Being careful not to disturb him, I eased out of the bed and slipped on my shoes. After using the bathroom and splashing water on my face, I felt more awake. The few hours of sleep I'd gotten by Kade's side was more than I'd had in days, though I was still tired. I felt like I could lie down and sleep for a week.

As I came out of the bathroom I suddenly realized . . . Blane wasn't there.

Maybe he'd gone downstairs for coffee or something? I prayed I was right, but knew it was more likely that he'd woken, seen me in bed with Kade, and left.

I hadn't meant to fall asleep. I'd just been so tired and so relieved to speak to Kade, but now I regretted climbing into bed with him. I didn't want to dwell on what Blane must be thinking.

The thought of Blane and Kade still being at odds, even after everything that had happened, had my stomach churning with nausea. Grabbing my purse, I decided to go get some coffee. Everything would look better once I had some caffeine in my system. Even hospital coffee was better than nothing.

Unfortunately, I didn't spot Blane in the cafeteria as I'd hoped I would. My heart sank. I must have been right in guessing that he'd left. Was he angry with me? He couldn't be angry at Kade, not after what he'd done to save Blane. I'd much rather have him mad at me, though I didn't want to hurt either Blane or Kade—I loved them both too much for that.

I sipped my coffee, loaded up with cream and sugar, as I headed back to Kade's room. The sound of voices greeted me as I drew closer to his partially open door. I recognized Mona's voice as she spoke, and her husband Gerard's. Kade must have woken. They would be overjoyed to see him conscious again.

I paused outside the door, glancing in just long enough to see Kade sitting upright in the bed while Mona, Gerard, and Blane surrounded him. Mona laughed, likely at something Kade had said. I could hear his voice, a low rasp when he spoke, but it was too quiet for me to understand what he was saying. They were all smiling, even Blane.

I thought about going in—I wanted to go in—but my feet wouldn't obey.

They were all there together, happy. A family. If I went in, there'd be tension, putting a strain on everyone. Blane's smile would become forced. Kade would be stressed, the last thing he needed as his body tried to recover. Mona and Gerard wouldn't know what to say, since no one would want to talk about the elephant in the room.

Me.

I didn't want that, for any of them. So I did the only thing I could think of doing.

I turned around . . . and I left.