



# Letting Go (The Surrender Trilogy)

By Maya Banks

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**Letting Go (The Surrender Trilogy)** By Maya Banks

## THE FIRST BOOK OF THE SURRENDER TRILOGY

In her sensational *Breathless Trilogy*, #1 *New York Times* bestselling author Maya Banks tested the boundaries of desire. In her new trilogy, there's only one thing left to do: cross them. And never have the consequences of erotic exploration been so irresistibly inviting, so shockingly intimate, and so totally unexpected...

## LETTING GO

Josslyn found perfection once, and she knows she'll never find it again. Now widowed, she seeks the one thing her beloved husband couldn't give her: dominance. Lonely, searching for an outlet for her grief and wanting only a brief taste of the perfection she once enjoyed, she seeks what she's looking for at an exclusive club that caters to people indulging in their most hedonistic fantasies. She never imagined that what she'd find would be the one man who's long been a source of comfort—and secret longing. Her husband's best friend.

Dash has lived in an untenable position for years: in love with his best friend's wife but unwilling to act on that attraction. He'd never betray his best friend. And so he's waited in the wings, offering Joss unconditional support and comfort as she works past her grief, hoping for the day when he can offer her more.

When he finds her in a club devoted to the darker edges of desire, he's furious because he thinks she has no idea what she's getting herself into. Until she explains in detail what it is she wants. What she needs. As realization sets in, he is gripped by fierce, unwavering determination. If she wants dominance, he is the only man who will introduce her to that world. He is the only man who will touch her, cherish her...love her. And the only man she'll ever submit to.

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### Editorial Review

Review

#### Praise for Maya Banks and her novels:

“Incredibly awesome...I love Maya Banks and I love her books.” —Jaci Burton, *New York Times* bestselling author

“Move over Fifty Shades...Maya got a little somethin’ somethin’ for ya.” —Examiner.com

“When it comes to the steam factor...be ready to get burned!”—*Under the Covers*

“Maya Banks...really dragged me through the gamut of emotions. From...‘is it hot in here?’ to ‘oh my GOD’...I’m ready for the next ride now!”—*USA Today*

“[A] one-two punch of entertainment that will leave readers eager for the next book.”—*Publishers Weekly*

“A cross between the Bared to You or Fifty Shades series and the Wicked Lovers series by Shayla Black.”—*Book Savvy Babe*

“Hot enough to make even the coolest reader sweat!”—*Fresh Fiction*

“You’ll be on the edge of your seat with this one.”—Night Owl Reviews

“Definitely a recommended read.”—*Fallen Angel Reviews*

#### About the Author

**Maya Banks** is a #1 *New York Times* bestselling author whose chart toppers have included erotic romance, romantic suspense, contemporary romance, and Scottish historical romance.

She lives in the South with her husband and three children and other assorted babies, such as her two Bengal kitties and a calico who’s been with her as long as her youngest child. She’s an avid reader of romance and loves to dish books with her fans and anyone else who’ll listen! She very much enjoys interacting with her readers on Facebook and Twitter as well as in her Yahoo!

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#### One

Josselyn Breckenridge surveyed her appearance in the mirror, nervous even though no one would see her. Except Dash. She knew without confirming that he’d be here, just as he’d been here on this day for the previous two years, waiting to take her to the cemetery to visit and put fresh flowers on her husband’s grave.

The flowers were on the counter beside her, just waiting for her to pick up and carry out of the house. But she hesitated, because this year . . . This year was different. She was apprehensive and yet resolved.

She had to move on with her life. She had to let go. It hurt, and yet at the same time, it brought her a measure of relief, as if a great weight had been lifted from her shoulders. It was time. All she had left to do was visit

Carson's grave and make peace with her decision.

She smoothed her shirt and ran her hands down the legs of her jeans. Not what she normally wore to the cemetery on the anniversary of her husband's burial. In the last two years, she'd worn black. It hadn't seemed respectful to go casual, as if the visit wasn't that important.

But she also knew that Carson wouldn't want her to live like this. He'd want her to be happy. And it wouldn't have made him happy to know she still mourned him so deeply.

With a sigh, she applied a light gloss to her lips and quickly fastened her long hair into a ponytail, leaving part of it loose in a messy bun.

This was the real Joss. Not fussy. More comfortable in jeans and a casual shirt than the expensive dresses and jewelry her husband had loved to spoil her with. Only underneath her clothing did she wear the sexy lingerie her husband had so loved to see her in.

She closed her eyes, refusing to look back, to remember how it felt when he touched her. How his hands moved over her body, knowing it better than she knew it herself. He knew exactly how to please her, how to touch her, kiss her, make love to her.

He'd given her everything she could have ever wanted. His love. His respect. Everything but the one thing she needed most, and it was something she could have never asked him for. She'd loved him too much to ever demand of him something he couldn't give her.

She shook away the heavy veil of sadness, determined to get through the day and on with her life. Her new life.

She picked up the flowers, her favorite, brought them to her nose, closing her eyes as she inhaled. They were what Carson always gave her. Every birthday. Every anniversary. Or any time just because. Today she'd place them on his grave and walk away. This time for good.

She didn't need to see the cold slab of marble that marked his life and death to remind her of her husband. That wasn't the way she wanted to remember him. She was through torturing herself by standing over his grave, missing him with her every breath.

He'd live in her heart and soul always. That was where she'd visit him in the future. Not on the grassy knoll that covered the casket underneath.

She walked briskly to the front door, letting herself out and blinking against the sudden wash of sun. Though it was spring, the Houston weather was already warm and she was glad she'd worn the short sleeved T-shirt instead of the black dress she always wore.

And there was Dash, leaning against his car, waiting for her as she knew he would be. He straightened when he saw her, and she saw a brief flicker of surprise before he schooled his features and extended a hand to her.

She slid her fingers over his and he gave her hand a light squeeze. No words were necessary. They both grieved the loss of her husband and his best friend.

"You look lovely, Joss," Dash said as he walked her around to the passenger side.

She smiled, knowing she didn't look particularly lovely today. And he was likely surprised by her casual appearance, but he didn't remark on it. He took the flowers and carefully positioned them in the back so they

wouldn't fall over, and then closed her door after ensuring she was fully inside.

She watched him stride around the front of the car, his long legs eating up the distance in a matter of seconds. Then he slid into the driver's seat and his scent wafted through her nostrils.

Dash always smelled the same. Utterly masculine, though she knew he never wore cologne or aftershave. He was a no-frills kind of guy, much like Carson had been, though her husband had worn expensive clothing and even his casual wear was tailored to fit his personality.

Even Dash's car fit his personality. A sleek black Jaguar. How appropriate he drove a vehicle named for a predator. He fit the part well.

They'd been partners in business, but Carson had always been the front man. The one who wined and dined clients, the polished spokesman, the one who sealed the deals, attended all the social events while Dash worked behind the scenes. The closer. The one who always did most of the legwork and fixed the problems.

Carson had often laughed and said he was the looks and charm and Dash was the brains of the operation. But Dash was certainly not lacking in looks or charm. They were the complete antithesis of one another. Carson was fair-haired to Dash's dark brown and while Carson's eyes were blue, Dash's were a deep brown, enhanced by his darker coloring. He wasn't any less attractive than Carson. His was just a quieter attractiveness. Silent. Brooding almost. He had made Joss nervous back when she'd first met him when she and Carson had dated. Theirs had been a whirlwind courtship. Carson had swept her off her feet, and Joss had known that Dash was concerned that his friend was getting in way over his head. Moving too fast. The fact Joss knew that had made her wary of Dash, but over time, he'd become her rock. Especially after Carson had died.

As they drove out of Joss's exclusive subdivision, Dash reached over for her hand, lacing his fingers through hers, and as he'd done before, he squeezed lightly, a gesture of reassurance.

Joss turned and smiled at him, telling him without words that she was okay. As they stopped at a red light, Dash studied her intently, almost as if he were trying to decipher what was different about her.

Evidently satisfied with whatever he'd seen in her eyes or expression, he smiled back, but he kept hold of her hand as he navigated through traffic on the way to the cemetery, just a few miles from where Joss and Carson had lived.

The drove in comfortable silence, but then they'd never conversed much on the day Dash drove her to the cemetery every year. Oh, Joss visited at other times, but Dash always accompanied her on the anniversary.

But that wasn't the only time she saw Dash. He'd stepped in from the moment Carson had passed away and he'd been her rock ever since. That first year especially, she'd needed him desperately and he never hesitated, no matter what she needed, whether it was help deciphering the paperwork and red tape after her husband's death or simply coming over to keep her company on the days she felt herself falling apart.

She would be forever grateful for Dash and his unwavering support over the last three years, but it was time to move on. It was time for her to stand on her own two feet and it was time for Dash to stop having to babysit her.

Today was not only about her letting go of Carson, but of Dash as well. He deserved more than to be saddled with the responsibility of his best friend's widow. He had a life of his own. She had no idea of his relationships or if he was even in a steady relationship. She realized with sudden clarity just how selfish and

self-absorbed she'd been since her husband's death. Dash had been a steady fixture, one she'd taken for granted, but she would do it no longer. It would be a miracle if Dash were in a steady relationship because not many women would be tolerant of Dash dropping everything to rush to the aid of his best friend's widow.

When they arrived at the cemetery, Dash parked and Joss immediately got out, not waiting for him to come around for her. She opened the door to the backseat and leaned in to retrieve the flowers.

"I'll get them, Joss."

Dash's low voice brushed over her ears, causing a prickle at her nape. She picked up the vase and turned with a reassuring smile.

"I've got it, Dash. I'm okay."

He gave her an inscrutable stare and she got the impression he was studying her again, trying to peel back the layers and get into her head. It was as if he knew something was different but couldn't put his finger on it. Which was just as well, because Joss would die if Dash could read her thoughts. If he knew just what it was she'd planned and how she intended to move on with her life.

He'd be horrified, no doubt. He'd wonder if she'd finally snapped and he'd probably haul her into a shrink's office so fast it would make her head spin. Which was why she had no intention of letting him know.

Her girlfriends were another matter. Chessy would understand absolutely. She'd even be encouraging. Kylie . . . not so much.

Kylie was Joss's sister-in-law, Carson's only sibling. They'd both grown up in horrific circumstances, and just as Carson could never provide what Joss craved—needed—neither would Kylie ever understand what drove Joss.

She might even be angry with Joss's choices. Might think it was a betrayal of her brother. Joss could only hope she'd support Joss even if she didn't fully understand.

But she was getting ahead of herself. First the cemetery and talking to Carson one last time. Then she'd tackle her best friends over lunch. She needed as much as possible to keep busy today, because tonight?

Tonight was when it all began.

Joss waited for the betraying sting of tears as they neared Carson's grave. But oddly, she felt at peace for the first time in three long years. Yes, it was time.

She knelt and gently brushed away the leaves and dust at the base of the headstone before setting the vase of flowers in the middle. Her gaze drifted upward to the inscription. The reminder of Carson's birth and death.

Her finger slowly traced the words. Beloved husband, brother and best friend. Those words said it all. A reminder of those left behind who mourned him still. She'd insisted that Dash be honored on the headstone, as he was every bit as much family as herself and Kylie. She only wished they'd had children so his legacy and memory would live on through them.

But as with any young couple, they'd thought they had all the time in the world. Carson was apprehensive about having children. He feared that he shared the same genetic traits that his father had possessed. No matter how many times Joss had gently reminded him that he was nothing like his father, Carson still lived in



fear of hurting those he loved the most.

She understood his fear. She knew how much he loved her. She also knew he'd die before ever hurting her or any children they had. But the darkness of his past still overshadowed his present. The past still haunted his dreams at night. Though Kylie, his sister, hadn't spoken of it often, Joss knew that Kylie had the same nightmares that Carson had. That she shared many of the same sleepless nights Carson experienced.

A wave of sadness overtook Joss. Such a waste. Carson's father had destroyed the lives of two innocent children. Worse, he lived on well into their adulthood, influencing their choices, always living in their fears even though he was dead. He still held them in his grasp from the grave, his memory and the memories of all he did torturing them still.

"Joss?"

Dash softly called her name, breaking through her thoughts, and she realized just how long she'd knelt there at the base of the monument, tracing the inscription with her fingers.

He sounded worried and a little uncertain, and Dash was never nothing if not sure of himself.

She turned, tilting her head up so her gaze connected with Dash's.

"Give me a moment please. Wait for me at the car if you don't mind. I'll only take a few minutes and then I'll be ready to go."

Again, surprise flickered in Dash's eyes. Never before had she asked to be left alone at Carson's grave. It had been too difficult, too emotional. Dash had always remained at her side, steady and strong, her rock to lean on. He'd stayed with her as long as she wanted to remain and then he'd take her back to the car and back home, where he'd spend the rest of the afternoon sitting with her as she cried on his shoulder.

Not today. Not anymore.

"If you're sure," he said hesitantly.

She nodded firmly, making sure no tears threatened. She wasn't going to unravel in front of him. She'd been doing that far too long.

"All right," he conceded. "Take your time, honey. I've arranged to take the entire day off."

She smiled. Of course he would have. But she didn't intend for him to spend it with her as he'd done in the past. There was too much to get done before tonight. And she didn't want to chance breaking her resolve and confiding in Dash. Not only was it not appropriate, but he would most certainly not approve. He'd think she'd lost her damn mind.

And maybe she had. Or perhaps she was just getting it back.

She turned back as Dash headed back toward the car and then pushed herself upward to stand over the grave. She stared down, her jaw tight, locking down her emotions for the conversation she intended to have with her husband.

"I love you, you know," she said, almost as if he were standing there in front of her. "I'll always love you, Carson. But I want you to know I'm going to move on. Try to move on," she amended. "Starting tonight. I know there were . . . things . . . you couldn't give me. And I want you to know I never resented you for that.

God, I loved you far too much to ever expect you to give me something it was impossible for you to give.

“But you’re gone now.”

Her voice cracked as she said the last, and she swallowed back the surge of tears.

“I’m lonely, Carson. I miss you so much. Not a day goes by that I don’t miss you. You were so good to me. The love of my life. I know I’ll never find that again. Finding perfection once in a lifetime is incredible. But twice? No, I know there’ll never be another for me like you. But there are things I . . . need,” she whispered. “Things you couldn’t give me. Things I’d never ask you for. And I wanted to come here today to tell you. To say that I wouldn’t be back. Not because I don’t love you or that I’m going to forget you. But this isn’t what I want my memory of you to be. I want to remember you in life. And us in love. And it’s too painful for me to come here and talk to you, knowing that I’ll never get you back.”

She took a deep breath and forged ahead.

“I’ve found a place that specializes in . . . dominance. I need to know if it’s what I’m missing. If it’s always been what I’m missing. Maybe I’ll find the answer. Maybe I won’t. But I have to try. I have to know. And I couldn’t go without telling you. Without explaining that I never lacked for anything when we were married. I never doubted even for a moment that you loved me, and you would have given me the moon if I asked. But this . . . This I couldn’t ask you for. And right now I need something to fill the void. There’s a hole in my soul, Carson. One that I may never fill again. But right now I’d take even a bandage. Temporary solace, if you will. I just wanted you to know. I’ll be okay. I’m not going into a dangerous situation. I’ve made certain that I’ll be safe. And as painful as it is for me to say this, I’m finally letting you go. I’ve held on to you for too long now. I can’t do it anymore. Life is happening around me. Life goes on. That sounds so trite, doesn’t it? But it’s true. Chessy and Tate worry for me. Kylie worries. And Dash. God, I’m surprised he hasn’t washed his hands of me yet. I’ve been such a burden to him—to them all—these last three years and I don’t want to be that woman any longer.

“You gave me the confidence and independence to fly. I want that back again, Carson. You taught me so much. You gave me the world. The problem is when you left, you took my world with you. And I want it back again. I want to live and not be this hollow shell of myself that I’ve been since you died.”

She sucked in a steadying breath, knowing what she said next was dumb. But she had to get it off her chest. Say it and then let go of the nagging emotion.

“I also want to tell you that I forgive you. I know that sounds so stupid. You don’t need my forgiveness. But I was so angry with you for so long for leaving me. I was so selfish. I’ve spent three years being angry and resentful, and starting today, I’m not going to be that person anymore.”

She let her hand drift down to glide across the sun-warmed marble of the headstone.

“I love you. I miss you. I’ll always love you. But good-bye, Carson. Wherever you are, I hope you’re at peace and I hope you know how very much I loved you. Thank you for loving me.”

She closed her eyes as tears gathered and she didn’t reopen them until she was certain she could return to the car where Dash waited without looking like she’d fallen apart.

With one last glance at the grave and the flowers that had already lost a few petals to the wind, she turned, squared her shoulders and walked away. The wind picked up and the sun broke further through the clouds, shining down on her face. She turned her face upward, soaking in the warmth as peace enveloped her in its

gentle embrace. It was as if Carson were sending her a message, or perhaps she only imagined him blessing her decision.

Dash held the door open for her, his gaze fixed on her face as if he were trying to ascertain her mood. She was careful to keep herself from showing any outward emotion. Because what she would say next she was certain he would object to, and if he thought she was upset, he'd never leave her alone the rest of the day.

She waited until he was behind the wheel and they were driving away before she turned to him.

"I have lunch plans today, so you don't have to stay with me. And I have plans for tonight as well," she murmured, letting him make of that what he would.

Dash's brow furrowed, and he made no effort to hide his concern. He reached for her hand as they stopped at a light.

"What's going on with you, honey?"

His tone was worried and his eyes were boring intently into hers.

She gave him a half smile. "I'm having lunch with Kylie and Chessy. It's time I stop with the grieving widow act every year on the same day. It's been three years, Dash. He's gone and he's not coming back."

She halted a moment, the pain of her statement momentarily stealing her breath. But it had to be said. To be acknowledged. And perhaps saying it aloud made it that much more real.

She could swear she saw relief flash in his deep brown eyes, but it was gone so quickly she was sure she imagined it.

"Are you sure you don't want me to come over after you have lunch with the girls?"

She shook her head. "No. It's not necessary, Dash. You've babysat me for long enough. It's time for me to stand on my own two feet. I'm sure it has to come as a relief to you that you don't have to hover over me for fear I'll lose it. I'm just sorry I've been such a burden to you for so long."

This time a glint of anger flashed in those dark eyes. "You're not a burden, damn it. Carson was my best friend, Joss. He—and you—mean a hell of a lot to me."

She squeezed his hand as he accelerated after a car behind them honked angrily when Dash didn't immediately go when the light turned green.

"And I appreciate that. I appreciate all you've done for me. But it's time, Dash. I have to do this. He's gone. I have to accept that."

Dash didn't respond. He directed his gaze forward, tension thick in the interior of the car. Had she angered him? She'd only been honest, and she'd sincerely thought he would be glad that he no longer had to treat her like a fragile piece of glass. That he could resume his own life without making her a priority in his.

When they arrived back at her house, she got out, as did Dash. He walked her to the door and she went in, turning back to tell him thank you and good-bye.

"This isn't good-bye," he said tightly. "Just because you think you no longer need me doesn't mean I'm going to just disappear. Prepare yourself for that, Joss."

With that, he spun on his heel and strode back down the sidewalk, leaving her staring open-mouthed as he drove away.

## **Users Review**

### **From reader reviews:**

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#### **Raymond Bailey:**

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#### **Jennifer Evans:**

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