

Cornered (Corcoran Team Book 1)

By HelenKay Dimon

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It was an assignment he was more than prepared for—until an innocent beauty got caught in the cross fire

Undercover agent Cameron Roth's hot on the trail of a drug-running crime cartel. The last thing he needs is to involve an innocent woman in the cross fire. But when he leaps into Julia White's home for safety, she becomes part of the tangled web Cam's trying so desparately to unravel. Smooth, solid Cam's the consummate professional. But gorgeous, feisty Julia transforms the high-stakes assignment into something far more than business as usual. Now that the villains have her in their sights, Cam's got to not only solve the case—but also protect the only woman who's ever found the way into his heart.

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Award-winning author HelenKay Dimon spent twelve years in the most unromantic career ever - divorce lawyer. After dedicating all of that effort to helping people terminate relationships, she is thrilled to deal in happy endings and write romance novels for a living. Her books have been featured in *Cosmopolitan Magazine* and E! Online. HelenKay loves hearing from readers, so stop by her website at www.helenkaydimon.com and say hello.

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A crack of gunfire echoed through the towering trees. That sort of thing would have sent Julia White scrambling for her cell phone and dialing for the police back in her normal life. But not on Calapan Island, the tiny strip of land miles from Seattle and accessible only by ferry. Here people fired weapons for sport, as a warning or just because it was Tuesday.

She didn't know the reason this time and didn't much care. Rather than flinch or worry, she stayed kneeling in the dirt, weeding the overgrown rectangle of roots and vines that had once been a garden alive with color.

The summer sun warmed her bare arms as the breeze lifted her hair off her shoulders and kept it dancing in front of her eyes. Needing a drink of water and a barrette, she stabbed the end of the sharp shovel into the ground and stood. A break sounded good after an hour of getting nowhere on the massive yard-work project.

She made it two steps before shots rang out again, this time multiple and in bursts. At the sound of the rapid rat-a-tat-tat, she spun around, trying to judge the distance between her and the bullets. Her gaze zipped from one end of the open yard to the other. A thunder of noise she couldn't identify filled her ears and grew closer as she scanned the part of the two acres she could see without moving away from the protective shield of the house.

A tangle of trees blocked her view to what lay beyond her father's falling-down property, but she didn't hesitate. Living in Seattle for the past two years had taught her one thing: don't invite danger. That meant moving. Smart women knew when to run.

She took off for the back porch as she tapped the pockets of her cargo shorts in search of her phone. Empty. Maybe that was for the best, since what passed for police on the island didn't exactly fill her with a sense of security. More like dread.

Her foot hit the bottom step right as the hair on the back of her neck stirred. That only made her jog faster. Anxiety rocketed through her as she reached for the door. Just as she tugged she heard it—heavy breathing, and not hers. She whipped her head around in time to see someone barreling toward her. Broad shoulders and big. Male and fast.

Her hand slipped on the knob, but she turned it. She managed to open the door an inch before a man's hand slammed against the frame by her head. The heat from his body radiated against her back as panic swamped her. She opened her mouth to scream, but a hand clamped over her face, blocking the sound.

"I'm not going to hurt you." The harsh whisper brushed across her ear.

Yeah, no way was she believing that.

She kicked out and shoved. Flailed and tried to run again, this time for the tree line. She would not go out like this. She'd always joked that if she stayed on Calapan she'd die. She refused to let that prediction come true.

She elbowed him in the stomach and heard him swear in response. Another shot or two like that and she might be able to put some distance between them and get inside. Gathering all her strength, she drew her arm forward again and pushed back. She hit nothing but air.

One minute she stood locked in an epic battle on the porch. The next, her attacker reached around her and got the door open. He propelled her forward, slamming the door behind them and locking them both inside.

He held up his hands as he stared at her with big blue eyes. "Please listen to me."

He could beg all he wanted. The dimple, those shoulders, the objective cuteness...she wasn't buying any of it. She'd never been charmed by a handsome face before and wasn't starting now.

If he wanted a fight, fine. She'd give him one. Without thinking or analyzing, almost on autopilot, she ran for the small family room on the far side of the kitchen. Guns didn't scare her, because they were a way of life on Calapan. Growing up here, she'd learned how to shoot. Cans, mostly, but she didn't plan on telling her attacker about that limitation.

Footsteps beat in time with hers. She ran. He stalked. He kept talking—something about needing her help—but she blocked it all out, her only thought being to find that rifle. There was a Glock around here, too.

"Ma'am, slow down for a second."

Not likely. She put a couch between them as she tried to remember where she had left the guns after she moved them around this morning. Her mind flipped to the fireplace, and a quick glance revealed one leaning against the mantel. The same fireplace mantel next to the attacker and not her.

Her mind raced with directions. *Draw him out. Let him talk.* She skipped all of it. "Get out."

"I will not hurt you." He hadn't lowered his hands.

That didn't mean he couldn't. Her gaze dipped to the gun strapped to his hip and the trickle of blood running down from the edge of the sleeve of his navy T-shirt. "Then leave."

"My name is Cameron Roth."

As if she cared. "Fine. Leave, Cameron."

"I work for a group called the Corcoran Team."

She didn't even know what he was talking about. Her mind stayed focused on the gun, the blood, the shots and the fact that a stranger stood in front of her. The combination was all her brain could process at the moment.

"I don't know who this team is, but you can go find them." She bit back the tremble in her voice and tried to get the words out as quickly and clearly as possible. "I'll pretend this never happened, but you need to leave now."

"I can't."

Looked as though logic wouldn't work on this guy. She mentally measured the distance from her to the gun and wondered if she could get there before he put his hands down. "You mean won't."

"I need you to stop worrying."

That voice, all soothing and calm. It called to her, but she refused to trust it. Not when it promised a one-way ticket to getting injured...or worse. "That's not going to happen with you standing in the middle of my house."

"I'm one of the good guys."

"Says the man who grabbed me and dragged me inside." Her gaze traveled over him and she thought she made out another weapon tucked into his jeans and outlined by his slim tee. "Were you the one out there shooting?"

All emotion left his face. His blank expression didn't give anything away. "There was a problem."

Forget the weapon—with that nonanswer the guy should be a lawyer. "I'll give you the keys to the car. You can take it and—"

"No." At his bark, she took a step back and he moved in, closing the gap again. "I'm here on assignment."

"What are you talking about?" She had no clue.

This was the nightmare that wouldn't end. She should have stayed in Seattle and let the house stand abandoned. Her father was gone and she didn't owe anyone on Cala-pan anything.

"I rendezvous with my team in fifteen minutes."

Again with the team thing. "Be extra punctual and go now."

The corner of his mouth twitched. "I would, but I don't want to be shot."

She wasn't sure if he was laughing at her or with her but didn't like either option. "That makes two of us, Cameron."

Some of the tension left his shoulders as he nodded toward the couch. "Sit."

He had to be kidding. "No."

"I'm at a disadvantage here. What's your name?"

This guy just kept talking when she needed him gone. "You aren't going to be here long enough for that to

matter."

"There are some nasty people after me." He lowered his arms, but his hand didn't venture near the gun. "I'm just hiding out here for a few minutes."

"Who?" If there were more people out there with weapons, she wanted to be ready. His eyes narrowed.
"What?"

"Who is after you?"

His gaze went to the rifle and lingered for a second before returning to her face. "Let's just say some of the people on this island can't be trusted."

Yeah, that was a lesson she knew all too well. "Understatement."

"What?"

She ignored the question because she had bigger problems. Now he knew where all the weapons were. That left knives, and grabbing for those gave her the shivers. "Just so we're clear, you're running around the island shooting and being tracked by someone and have no trouble manhandling me—"

"That didn't actually happen."

"—yet I'm supposed to trust you." Her voice got louder as she went on.

He had the nerve to smile at her. "Yes."

"I'm not an idiot." Sure, her brain kept malfunctioning and waves of fear crashed over her every two seconds, but she was not letting her world end like this.

"I never said you were."

"And I have a phone." She lunged for the landline. It had been disconnected months before, after her father died. But this Cameron guy didn't know that...at least, she hoped he didn't. "The police can come and you can explain your problem."

"That's not going to work."

She'd read somewhere that trying to form a bond with an attacker sometimes helped humanize the victim. Since she was the victim, she was willing to try anything. "Tell me why, Cameron."

"You can call me Cam."

Apparently the bond thing worked. She shook the phone. "Talk or I'm dialing 9-1-1."

"That would be a mistake."

There was something about the way he said it. "Why?"

"The police are the problem."

A crack shattered the glass behind her, spraying it over the room. She ducked. Probably screamed. Just as she crossed her arm over her head, a heavy weight crashed into her. She hit the floor and skidded across it with Cameron on top of her.

When they stopped, he pinned her down. The second their bodies touched she started moving. She shifted her legs and tried to knee him anywhere it would hurt. He caught her leg and held a hand up as if to tell her to be quiet. The whole time his gaze scanned the room and his gun dug into her stomach.

Through all the kicking and squirming, the silence finally registered in her brain. She picked up his breathing and heard her own hammering in her ears. Other than that, nothing. No more shooting. No yelling.

He leaned up on his elbow and glanced down with their faces only inches apart. "Are you okay?"

"No."

He lifted his body off her and looked down the slim space between them. "You're hit?"

"I mean mentally." When she realized Cam's body shielded hers, that he was protecting, not attacking, she let the backs of her hands fall against the dusty floor. "I don't understand what's happening."

"That makes two of us." He shifted his body to the side as he slipped the gun out of its holster.

"Who is shooting at you now?" And why had Cam brought the person to her doorstep?

He crawled over to the one remaining intact family room window, ignoring the broken glass from the previous chaos and the crunching under his knees. "Your police chief."

Chief Kreider wasn't her anything. The guy had the whole old-boy thing down, all entitled and drunk on power...except for those times he was actually drunk. She was not a fan.

Following Cam, because he seemed like a good guy to hide behind, she sat on the other side of the window and peeked out. Three random men stood out there, armed and dressed in some sort of law enforcement uniforms. None of them looked familiar and they all wore lethal shoot-first expressions.

That fast, she lost her ability to breathe.

Cam pulled her back down. "Be careful."

She only caught a glimpse, but... "You said you were fighting the police chief, right?"

"The guy standing in the middle of your yard."

"None of them is the police chief."

Cam's mouth dropped open. "What?"

"I think your problem just got bigger."

"And I think, since you're trapped in here with me, I'm not the only one with a problem." He reached behind his back and took out a second gun. Before she could scream or bolt, he handed it to her. "Do you know how to use this?"

"Yes." She took it but wished she didn't have to.

"Good."

"Not really." Something collapsed inside her. "I hate this island."

This time he did smile at her, full and sexy and the exact opposite of threatening. He opened her hand and put the gun in it. "Looks as if we finally agree on something."

For some reason she didn't find the look or his cuteness comforting. "Julia White."

"What?"

"I figure if we're going to die together you should know my name." It actually hurt to say those words.

Not that they affected him. No, he winked at her. "You're not dying on my watch, Julia."

"You sound confident."

"You can consider it a guarantee."

Chapter Two

Cam slid his body up along the wall and stood up. With his back covered, he peeked outside again. The men outside hadn't moved, which struck him as pretty bad planning. If he were in charge of the attack party, they'd be surrounding the house and moving in by now.

Thank goodness for amateurs.

His gaze bounced back to Julia. He couldn't help being impressed with the way she held it together. He'd rushed her, touched her and forced his way inside her house. Acted in a way that he begged to be punched. He'd watched the fear come over her, and before he could calm her, she'd controlled it. Taken the energy pinging around inside her and focused.

It was sexy as hell. So was the long wavy brown hair and then there were those big chocolate-brown eyes. Not that he had the time to notice...but he did.

He reeled those thoughts in because he had no plans to die today. He'd just made a vow to Julia, so now he had to figure out a way out of this mess without too much bloodshed. He'd brought the firefight to her door by accident. Even if it meant taking a bullet, he'd get her out.

She peeked around the windowsill, then ducked her head again. "Why are they just standing out there?"

"Good question." Cam kept his focus on the men. If he flinched they could move out of his sight, and he could not let that happen. Three of them, one dressed as the police chief and two in flannel shirts, which

made them stand out in summer.

"I have another question," she said.

This time he glanced over at her. Seeing the pale face and the way her hand shook as she brushed the hair out of her eyes sent a shot of guilt through him. Still, he wasn't used to a lot of conversation in the middle of a shoot-out. "Now might not be the best time."

She checked the weapon before looking up again. "Why did you think they were police?"

Looked as though she talked when she got nervous. He tried to contain the adrenaline coursing through him enough to keep up the harsh whispering. "The uniform, plus the other two were at the police station. The chief knew I was coming. The usual."

She frowned. "That's the usual for you?"

"Uh, yeah." It all made sense to him, but in hindsight he'd played it too safe in the minutes leading up to his meeting. He could have checked identities through facial recognition, but that wasn't standard operating procedure for a job like this. It was supposed to be an easy witness pickup, not a death match.

Her attention did not waver. It stayed locked on him. "Who are you and what do you do?"

They absolutely didn't have time for that discussion.

"Later."

Users Review

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