

The story behind scream for me

When I started *Scream For Me*, I had a problem. I had two really wonderful characters that truly walked out of my imagination, each having a backstory that I knew nothing about. It was like a blank canvas, but in a different way than most of my characters. They were already moving, already having a plot, but they were strangers. I had a lot of catching up to do!

I decided that the place to start was on Daniel's first day back to work after the whole Simon debacle. There would be stares and whispers and people wondering about his family, without even knowing about the pictures he held.

I had an outline, but really wrote this story by the seat of my pants. I wasn't sure how it all connected and at the end of Daniel's story, I had even more questions!

Thanks to *Die For Me*, I knew whatever had happened, it had occurred when Simon was younger and Daniel was away at college (because I'd set it up that way in *Die For Me*). I started thinking about who might have been involved and how very hard it would be to keep whatever they'd done a secret.

And then I remembered a quote from Ben Franklin that I'd found intriguing: 'Three may keep a secret, if two of them are dead.' I like the way Ben saw the world!

The plot thickened from there . . .

PS: Writing a trilogy is hard, especially when one doesn't plan ahead. I had so many loose ends, connecting them all was like weaving a tapestry. The next time I wrote a connected series, I planned all the important connections well in advance.

Where are the scream for me characters now?

- Special Agent Daniel Vartanian continues his work with the Georgia Bureau of Investigation. He does a fair amount of training these days and is frequently the partner given to the new agents. He and Alex have recently celebrated their third wedding anniversary by building a house outside of Atlanta and plan to fill it with what they hope to be a large, noisy family. They are off to a good start with two-year-old Thomas and newborn Katherine (named after Alex's parents).
- Alex Fallon Vartanian has taken a hiatus from her nursing career to spend time with her two children, but every Saturday finds her at the shelter at Peachtree and Pine, making pancakes for the homeless families. During the week she keeps busy with her work at the addiction center that supported her stepsister, Bailey, in her recovery.
- Bailey Crichton Beardsley has been clean and sober for four years now. She married Captain Ryan Beardsley one year to the day after she finished her drug rehab. She wanted to be sure it had 'stuck' before walking down the aisle. Her daughter Hope, now 8 years old, was her flower girl and her beaming stepsister, Alex, her matron of honor. Everyone cried their eyes out except for Ryan Beardsley, who only had eyes for his bride. Bailey has a job as a hairstylist in a fashionable part of town but has not forgotten her past. She regularly volunteers in the local rehab center, helping others break the cycle of their addictions.
- Captain Ryan Beardsley transitioned from US Army active duty to reserve duty shortly after meeting Bailey. He wanted to be

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there for her and Hope as Bailey went through rehab a second time, due to her torture (and re-addiction) at the hands of an evil villain. Recognizing that Bailey was having issues maintaining her sobriety due to the constant reminder of her surroundings, he suggested they move. Utilizing Meredith Fallon's network of contacts, he was able to find a job working with veterans in Cincinnati and shortly after his and Bailey's wedding, he moved his little family to the Midwest to start a new life. He is a very happy man.

- Dr Meredith Fallon returned to her life in Cincinnati where she continues her counseling work with children and adolescents. She still incorporates play therapy as an important tool, but has since added music and art therapy to the approaches she uses to reach out to troubled children. She has maintained her relationship with Hope, now 8 years old. She is Hope's go-to babysitter and the two of them will color with crayons. Still single, Meredith continues to hope for her own happy-ever-after. She's a big believer in love, but she just hasn't found the right guy yet. Or at least she doesn't yet know that she's met him . . .
- Hope Beardsley is a charming, bright little girl who appears to have come through the worst of her ordeal with flying (Crayola) colors. Adopted by Ryan Beardsley shortly after her parents' wedding, she is a happy child. She loves living in Cincinnati near her 'aunt' Meredith and has made a lot of new friends. She misses her aunts Alex and Susannah, but sees them often via Skype. Currently she wishes to be a veterinarian. Or a musician. Or possibly an Olympic ice skater. She still worries about her mother, but less frequently and with less intensity. She's finally starting to believe she and her mother have found a forever home with her new dad.
- Riley the basset hound is as happy as a doggy clam now that he has a big yard to run in and children to play with (although the baby is not much fun right now). He is especially interested in the girl dog that lives next door. He is, however, annoyed with all the notes and signs his people have posted around the house warning everyone to never, *ever* give him people food. So he

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exploded a little when he got into the people food that one time? Okay, it was more than one time, but who's counting? The carpet is cleanable.

- Special Agent Luke Papadopoulos works with the Georgia Bureau of Investigation and is the hero of *Kill For Me*.
- Susannah Vartanian goes on to become the heroine of *Kill For Me*.

Fun Facts about scream for me

- The name 'Vartanian' came from one of my students when I taught high school. I just thought it was the coolest name. I never mentioned to anyone in the school that I'd utilized it. Years later the student tweeted to me, 'Hey, my girlfriend just read your book and found my name!'
- I wrote the first draft of this book – 600 pages – in 25 days. Afterwards my hands hurt so badly that I couldn't hold a coffee mug. I said, 'Never again' to such a lengthy writing binge and my hands are very grateful! I've binge-written since *Scream For Me*, but never for that length of time. I must admit that I miss the rush of the story just barreling through me. It's so much fun when all the pieces flow so seamlessly.
- Bailey's hairstylist friend, Desmond, is my actual hairdresser. He owns a shop called The Yellow Strawberry and is amazing. He was very happy to know that I didn't kill him off in this book!
- *Scream For Me* was excerpted in *Cosmopolitan* magazine as its 'Red Hot Read'. I still get e-mails from readers who have read the excerpt in an old copy, usually at the hairdressers. *Cosmo* magazines live for years in doctors' offices and hair salons, so this was an amazing opportunity.
- When I got the news that *Scream For Me* would be in *Cosmo*, I was staying with some friends in Minnesota. I said, 'Hm, I wonder which scene they'll excerpt.' My friend's husband gave me a look and said, 'Which scene do you *think* they'll pick?' I turned fifty shades of red when *that* scene hit me. Ha!
- Dutton, Georgia is a completely fictitious town. I knew it would

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be like Peyton Place, so I didn't want to use a real town and possibly be sued ☺.

- Agents Hatton and Koenig were two of the men who reported to me when I worked at Procter & Gamble. Hatton was very chagrined to find I'd given him six daughters in the book when the three kids he had in real life kept him tired out. They remain my treasured friends.
- *Scream For Me* was my first hardcover Top Ten in the UK and shortly after its release, I visited the UK on holiday. While in Edinburgh, I was asked to read an excerpt on BBC Radio because they liked my American southern accent. This still makes me chuckle as most Americans, including me, are enamored with Scottish accents and would listen, enraptured, if a Scottish person read the phonebook.
- While in Edinburgh, we stayed at a B&B owned by a man called Mac MacCool. This was his real name, not kidding. He asked me to sign his copy of *Scream For Me: To Mac, I know you didn't do it*. I can still hear his brogue in my mind!
- I chose the title, but it was my second go-round in the title game. My working title was *Lie For Me*, but we all agreed that wasn't scary enough.