



Loose and Easy

Tara Janzen

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He's the bad boy she always wanted.

He'd know her anywhere. Johnny Ramos had just come off a tour of duty in Afghanistan to find Esmee Alden trolling the mean streets of Denver in red lace and leather. The smartest girl he ever knew turning tricks? Not even close. Esmee's in danger so deep, only Johnny can get her out—which is why the elite government operative is shadowing her every move.

She's the good girl that got away.

Esmee had everything planned down to the last detail: dressed in disguise, she'd recover a stolen painting and pay off her dad's ruthless bookie. Until Johnny Ramos, her high school crush, blows into town and nearly blows her cover. Now Esmee, a P.I. and an art-recovery expert, has a mother lode of bad guys on her trail...including the one bad boy she always wanted: Johnny. But passion will have to wait. Because when bullets start flying, suddenly they're on the run, playing it fast and loose—and heading straight into the line of fire....

From the Paperback edition.

Loose and Easy Details

Date : Published August 26th 2008 by Dell (first published January 1st 2008)

ISBN : 9780440244691

Author : Tara Janzen

Format : Paperback 406 pages

Genre : Romance, Romantic Suspense, Suspense, Contemporary, Contemporary Romance, War, Military Fiction

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From Reader Review Loose and Easy for online ebook

jenjn79 says

I'm very glad I stumbled onto Janzen's *Steele Street* series back when the first book came out. It's such a great romantic suspense series with a fantastic group of characters, fast-paced plots, and sweet, sexy romances. I've enjoyed all the books, this one included, and look forward to future installments.

Loose and Easy is the 9th book in the overall *Steele Street* series (3rd of the *Loose* subset) and though you may be able to read this book on its own and understand most of it, this series really needs to be read from the beginning. There are a lot of references to past details/storylines and the supporting characters are all recurring so you just won't understand those things if you jump in in the middle.

Johnny Ramos, who I think has been a minor character since back in book 1 is back in Denver after 3 tours of duty with the Rangers and now hopes to be assigned to the SDF group at Steele Street. He's only been home 2 weeks when he spots a bedraggled hooker walking down the street. He's surprised to realize it is Esme Alexandra Alden, or Easy Alex as he once nicknamed her in school because she was anything but easy. So he follows her. He can't imagine how prim, proper high school valedictorian Esme ended up hooking.

Only Esme, a P.I. specializing in art-recovery, is just in disguise so she can recover a stolen painting and return it to its rightful owner. Who will then pay her money she desperately needs to pay off her dad's gambling debt to a very bad man. Things start off okay...she gets the painting...but then Johnny Ramos - the boy she almost gave her virginity to years ago - pops back into her life. From there, it's down hill. The loan shark after dad is now trying to grab her as insurance and she can't seem to shake Johnny. Eventually she gives in and lets him help. Which isn't a hardship, really, because he's still as sexy as he was all those years ago. She's not really surprised to realize she still wants him. But first she has to make the deal with the loan shark and get her dad out of trouble. Then maybe she can see where things go with Johnny. If only it were that simple...

This book starts off really great. The first couple chapters really sucked me into the story. Esme is a real firecracker. So the book got off to a solid beginning. I thought the early-middle chapters got bogged down a bit with too much detail, too much rehashing and going around the same information. I ended up skim reading a little bit now and then when there wasn't anything important going on. But the book picks up again later.

I don't think there's as much action in this one as there has been in past books, which is probably another reason why the book seems slow at times. It's hard to imagine a book that covers maybe a 6 hour time span - short even for a Tara Janzen book - being slow, but it was. There seemed to be a lot of internal monologue paragraphs for the characters and not as much of the snappy dialogue Janzen usually dishes out. That, combined with the lesser amount of action, just seemed to make the book drag in the middle.

It did get better though. And it didn't keep me from enjoying the characters, storyline and romance. The hero and heroine were both great characters. Esme is definitely a spitfire. There's something about a girl with gun, and who knows how to handle it, that's really fun to read about (well, as long as she's a good "guy"). And the chemistry she had with Johnny was hot. I'm always a fan of reunion romances, of which this is one. I enjoyed reading about how the two were finally able to get together.

This book also introduces the fascinating character of Dax Killian, Esme's cousin. He had some great scenes in this book and I'm really looking forward to getting to read more about him...which sounds like it may be in the next book, Breaking Loose, from reading the short excerpt at the end of this one.

All in all, this is still a great series to read. And Janzen has planted a lot of seeds for more storylines. The last book made it seem like there's unfinished business yet for Red Dog, plus laid groundwork for a romance between Red Dog's brother and SDF contractor Cherie Hacker. Then this book introduced a really, really big upcoming storyline that will send many SDF agents reeling. And it also set up a potential romance between Dax and Suzi Toussi, another past minor character. I also think there may be some issues to come for Dylan and Skeeter, if one of Johnny's internal thoughts hold true. So yeah, it looks like there's still a lot to come for this great series. And I look forward to reading all of it!

Gina says

A Cyclone of a story - would have been appreciated.

Johnny Ramos is back after his third tour of duty and is looking for a little down time. He has news he has to deliver and isn't looking forward to it. Leaving the bar, he spots someone he'd recognize anywhere; the object of his every fantasy: Esme Alden. He can't believe his eyes - no way the smartest girl in school is one the streets, turning tricks. Curiosity gets the better of him and he follows her.

Esme, aka Easy, is all grown up. She's a P.I. and an art-recovery expert, and she's on her way to do just that - to recover a stolen painting, bring it to its owner and get paid. That money will pay off her father's loan with a bookie.

Meanwhile, her mom was kidnapped from the parking lot at work, she can't find her father, and there are men after her. Seems the bookie, Franklin Bleak, wants Esme to use as collateral against her father.

In comes Johnny Ramos. He follows Esme, trying to play it cool, only to help her escape Bleak's goons. Now, she has a 5am deadline to bring Bleak the \$82,000 her father owes him. Will she be able to meet that deadline?

I don't know what to say. Not what I expected, not the usual that I read by Janzen. She introduces new characters well, but this time there were just too many 'goons' that it was hard to keep track of who was with who and where they were. While the twists were good, they were obvious. I like how Johnny sweeps back into Esme's life, the action scenes were perfect. I liked the 'badass' in Esme, but I didn't really feel the sparks that were there. Sure, you feel them from Johnny, but not so much with Esme. He's supposed to be the biggest crush she had in high school, but you don't feel it.

I found the action scenes good, I liked Dax Killian, Esme's cousin (and if the segway into the new book means what I think it means, he'll be in the next one). I did find that the ending went a little too smoothly. They had leverage against Bleak, he had leverage against them, and it all ended too neat and tidy. I was expecting more. It almost feels like the book was hastily written. Not to say that it was, it just felt like it. And yet, for all the book was lacking, I was still glued to each page, anxious to see how Johnny and Esme bail themselves out. I think, because the book was based on a 10 hour period instead of a couple of days took away from the book. A lot more could have happened in between. More explanation of her past few years would have been appreciated. It's like there's another story there, one that should have been told and the

reader never gets enough of to fully and completely understand.

Betsy says

Yay! Back to what I like about this series: action, cars, guns, strong and dangerous women, men who find that attractive

Helen says

Tara Janzen knows how to write a ticking-time-bomb romantic suspense. There's always a chase--in souped-up hot cars--a countdown to a disaster that must be averted, and an ever-heating-up sexual attraction between two characters the reader can believe should definitely be together--if only they could get over their hang-ups and survive the next 24 hours.

Esme and Johnny make a great team, and I love their romance, a coming together of two people who fell for each other in school, grew up apart, but never forgot their first love. What I didn't enjoy involved plot threads setting up the next book which left elements of this one unresolved. Nonetheless, a good read.

Erin says

Finally, Janzen has the breathing room (400 pages as opposed to her usual scant 300) to get the job done. This is a very satisfying romance with a very satisfying suspense plot. Esme is a tough girl without being a generic "warrior princess" type - she has a lot to learn, but she's a good PI and isn't afraid to draw her .45. Her back story, of a father who is good at heart but fails at parenting due to his gambling problem, was totally believable. I'd put her up there with Honey in terms of Janzen heroines. Johnny Ramos is another solid character, and we get to see him going from tough to bowled over and back again, instead of just being told what a badass he is. I also like the way Janzen reveals the bad guy, Franklin Bleak. The reader always knows he's the bad guy, but the physical reveal at the end of the book puts a nice cap on his previous scenes, which are mostly phone conversations with his henchmen.

Janzen also sets up her end game for the series in this book, and I can't wait to see how the team moves forward in the next book.

Can we talk about that cover for a second, though? I know that authors don't get to choose covers, and Janzen's have always been a little cheesy. But this looks like the love story of the two most boring accountants in the world. That is a truly hideous cover that does the book no justice.

Anita says

This book is number 9 in the Steele Street series. The plot takes place in less than 24 hours and there is a whole lot packed into that 24 hours. Non stop action from around 9 pm on a Friday night to early the next morning. The love story of two high school kids who never forgot each other culminates in a really hot

interlude in all the action.

In this book we are reintroduced to Johnny Ramos, a motor head friend of Skeeter's. He is now in his mid 20's and has had 3 combat tours of duty in Afghanistan as an Army Ranger. He is now home in Denver and waiting to be assigned to SDF. While having a beer at a local bar he notices a bedraggled little blonde hooker heading down the street. She looks awful familiar too. He follows and starts on a whirlwind 24 hours.

Esmee Alexandra Alden, valedictorian of her senior class, full scholarship to college and the one that got away from Johnny Ramos. She is working as a PI with her cousin Dax, specializing in stolen art recovery. She is on her way to "recover" a piece of art looted by the Nazis that is to sold. Esmee is in disguise as the bedraggled little blonde hooker. Johnny catches up with her, but Esmee is on a tight time schedule. That doesn't stop Johnny from saving her from two thugs sent by the bookie who is looking for an \$82,000 payoff from Esmee's dad. That is the root reason for this whole nights activities.

Anita says

Actual Rating: 3.5 Stars

Quinn says

Tara Janzen is one of the better writers of romantic suspense. *Loose and Easy* was a good, solid, entertaining read, but it was just missing the magic and awesomeness of the first couple of books in this series (I can't recall now why I didn't rate them 5 stars, but I can't in good conscience give this one less than 4 stars even though it wasn't as good as some of her earlier books).

Loose and Easy was something of a second-chance romance in amongst all the action sequences; and featured Johnny Ramos from the earlier books and now all grown up. When Johnny sees his crush from high school, Esme, trolling the street dressed as a hooker, he knows something is NQR, and does what any good agent would do - he follows. And finds himself up to his neck in trouble.

This one was Johnny and Esme's show. Unfortunately we only got to spend a small amount of time with the rest of the Steele Street gang, but this book sets us up to be spending lots more time with them in future books. We were also introduced to Jax Killian - I'll be happy to read his book any time.

Karen L Gallagher says

I read this entire series a while ago. I liked the writing style, setting and characters. Fun, fast reads - all of them.

Julia Applebee says

Always a fun read

Tara always does well with this series, I do miss the style she wrote in the first few. The later books are much different, but I still enjoy the Steele St series.

Auntee says

Whew! I'm glad I stuck with this one. After a real nice, fast start, this one quickly got bogged down in so many characters (thought I might need a scorecard) and so much detail, and nothing was really happening that I was losing interest rapidly. Luckily I decided to stick with it, and I'm glad I did. By around page 100, things started to take off, and the book then became hard to put down.

"Loose and Easy" was about Johnny Ramos (Skeeter Bang's pal), who was a minor character in the previous "Crazy" books. Johnny's all grown up now (early to mid 20s, I'd say) and just back in Denver from his third tour of duty as a U.S. Army Ranger, and hoping to now join the SDF (special defense force) team. While having a drink one night at a local bar, he notices a sad little hooker limping down the street. She looks awfully familiar to him--could it possibly be Esme Alden, valedictorian of his high school graduating class, his former crush, the girl that got away? My-my, how the mighty have fallen...

Johnny's known Esme (or "Easy Alex" as he knicknamed her) since the seventh grade, and always had a certain fascination with her. (As she did with him.) And she almost, almost surrendered her virginity to him in the backseat of SDF operator Christian Hawkin's 1971 Dodge Challenger 'Roxanne'. But "little miss goody two shoes" a prostitute? No way...something's not right with this picture.

Turns out that Esme is not a prostitute, just pretending to be one, so she could 'recover' a stolen painting from a rather twisted German guy who she meets up with at his hotel room. Esme's really a P.I. specializing in art-recovery and the reason she's trying to recover valuable stolen artwork is for the money it will bring her. Esme needs the money badly to pay off a local bookie that her dad is in hock to up to his eyeballs. It seems dad's got a real bad gambling problem, and it's finally catching up to him. So if Esme can 'recover' the stolen (by the Nazis) painting (which is worth millions) and return it to it's rightful owner, she will be paid \$82,000. Which just happens to be the amount owed to the bookie. If not, old dad is going to be fish food.

Well, Johnny follows her to the hotel room, witnesses the aftereffects of her dealings with the German (Esme leaves the thong wearing, dog collar clad German cuffed, hogtied, and leashed to the bedpost) and follows her out the window and down the street to her dad's office. He watches her (through the office's glass door) ditching her hooker's clothes and suddenly he's eighteen again, and he's remembering the backseat of that car...

So Johnny gets Esme to let him in, with the ruse that he needs to hire her father (a local P.I.). Johnny's still not sure what Esme is up to, but he plans to stick around and find out. And it's a good thing too, because suddenly a bunch of bad guys come out of the woodwork and start gunning for Esme. But Johnny sticks to her like glue. He's not going to let the only girl who's fascinated him for years get away again. He eventually finds out her story, convinces her to let him tag along to her meeting with the owner of the artwork, and then on to the meeting with the psycho bookie. Along the way, they have to dodge a lot of bad guys and bullets with their names on it (in Johnny's 1968 Mercury Cyclone named 'Solange'), and also figure out a way to free Esme's parents, who have been kidnapped by Mr. Bookie. That shouldn't be hard to do for a tough Ranger like Johnny, right? And of course, they rediscover those feelings that they had for each other all those years ago, and this time, they do something about it. And how. We're talkin' about some pretty smokin' hot scenes here. So, after all that plays out, and the bad guys are history, could there possibly be a future for

former bad-boy Johnny and 'the smartest girl he ever knew', Esme?

I loved the romance between Johnny and Esme. Tara Janzen's heroes are so tough, such bad boys, but they are so sweet to the women they love. And when they fall, they fall hard. No hemmin' and hawin' about their feelings. And the heroines are quite accomplished in their own right, too. No shrinking violets here. Esme was a smart, tough little customer when she had to be, and worked quite well with Johnny. And their big sex scene was very hot, but you have to wait a long, long time for it to happen, but it was very, very worth it! And as a bonus there is a very, very sweet and satisfying HEA to read about.

This book also introduces a new, very intriguing character, who I'm dying to read more about--Esme's cousin and partner in her P.I. business, former military 'legend' Dax Killian. Whew, he had some special moments in this book, including a potential future romance with former gallery owner, Suzi Toussi. That is one pairing I hope to read more about.

There's not too much interaction with the other members of the SDF as there was in the previous book. Dylan, Christian and the rest of the gang do appear near the end of the book for a big meeting with General Grant, who lays a very upsetting assignment on the team. Don't know if this will be part of the plot of the next book in the series, but if it is it's sure to be exciting because it's going to bring back a lot of the original operators from the 'Crazy' series, and I certainly wouldn't mind reading about them again.

So, I urge any fans of this series to give this book a chance, because it has a very nice payoff. Don't get hung up on all the characters and trying to keep everything straight, just focus on Esme and Johnny, and everything will fall into place. I can't believe that at one point I wanted to put it down, and by the end, I was hoping there would be 50 more pages to read! This was a very worthy addition to the series--4 stars!

Kara Jorge says

Johnny Ramos has just returned home after his third tour of duty in Afghanistan when he sees the girl of his dreams apparently turning tricks. He can't believe Esme "Easy Alex" Alden, class valedictorian, has sunk so low, so he abandons his beer and follows her. He finds out her hooker appearance has been a ruse from her real job as a private investigator, but it's not much of an improvement. Her work still has her consorting with lowlifes and criminals, and her current caper is fraught with nothing but danger, which makes Johnny determined to stay by her side. Before the night is through, he saves her from a kidnapping, helps her broker a stolen art deal, they escape crazed bookie's thugs using the "double dog dare," and they also manage to rekindle their old flame from high school, only this time it burns a whole lot hotter.

Sounds good, doesn't it? Unfortunately, it's not. The author has a roundabout delivery that reminds me of an excited kid telling a story: going around and around in circles repeating the same details while the plot barely moved along at an agonizing pace. This was further punctuated by a profusion of italicized exclamations (geezus! dammit! crap!) seen so often I began to believe they were there to fluff up the word count. Adding to the annoyance factor were numerous mentions of the Blue Iguana, which served no purpose but to get the clever name Blue Iguana in print a zillion times. Some readers may also be bothered by the high level of profanity that seemed just a bit excessive for the book's target audience and could cost it some much needed fans. Other readers might be disappointed that this "hot romance" didn't deliver any sex until past page 300.

I actually liked the characters. Esme was capable and down-to-earth, and Johnny was a rock-hard Latino

hottie with skills. What dragged the story down was an abundance of associations with characters with goofy monikers and everyone's obsession with their high school memories. The cars all seemed to have names, but since I think vintage muscle cars should, I'll let that one slide. There was actually much to like in this book, but the plot dragged slower than a hot summer day spent at work, and I simply could not stomach the author's roundabout way of meandering over to the point. Others may enjoy this chatty, chick-lit style, but it left me cold. For the kind of book that actually delivers what this one promised, I recommend Susan Andersen.

Christa says

This latest novel that ties into the Steele Street books was good, but was not one of my favorites of the series. The book was very fast paced, and all but a few pages take place within a twelve hour time period. This is typical of a Janzen book, but "Loose and Easy" was packed with so much action that I felt there wasn't enough space devoted to the romance and interactions between the hero and heroine. I loved both the hero and heroine, and liked what there was of the romance. I felt that their story was satisfactorily resolved in the book, but there just wasn't enough time given over to it. This is what kept it from being as good as some of the others in the series for me.

Johnny Ramos has just finished his third tour of duty as a U.S. Army Ranger, and is on leave waiting to be assigned to Denver's Special Defense Force. He has known the other operators for years, as they took him in during his rough teenage years, and he is thrilled to be a part of the group. As he sits in a Denver bar planning to have a quiet evening, he notices a woman on the street who appears to be a very down on her luck hooker - and she is none other than Johnny's high school class valedictorian whom he had a crush on for years. Johnny follows Esme Alden to a hotel, and when he hears unsettling noises outside of the door, he convinces a hotel maid to let him in the room. He is amazed by what he finds in the room, and decides to track Esme, worried about her possible involvement in drugs or worse.

Esme Alden is attempting to rescue her father from his latest difficulty. She has set a plan in motion that has to be followed exactly, and she has no time to spare. After liberating a stolen painting from a German criminal who believed she was a dominatrix, she leaves him bound and almost nude when a disturbance outside the hotel room door provokes her to escape out of the window. Arriving at her father's office to change out of her "hooker" disguise, Esme is confronted by her old classmate Johnny Ramos. Johnny says that he needs the services of her father, a private investigator, but Esme isn't sure she is buying that excuse. She puts him off and tries to leave to carry on her evening's work, but when Johnny sees a couple of men who are nothing but bad news headed toward her, he seizes her and escapes. When Esme realizes what is happening, she is grateful for Johnny's interference, but now she wants him to let her go so she can keep to her schedule. This is not agreeable with Johnny, and finally acting on the recommendation of her partner and cousin, Dax Killian, Esme lets Johnny know what she is really doing, and takes him along for the ride.

Johnny's evening suddenly turns into a dangerous escapade involving the girl he's never forgotten, Denver thugs, an eccentric art collector, his brother's old street gang, a cruel bookie, and menacing foreign criminals. He must protect Esme and help her rescue her parents while trying to ensure that his actions will not jeopardize his future with Denver's Special Defense Force.

After seeing Johnny as a very minor character in several of the Steele Street books, I was glad to read his story. He was a good character, and it was easy to get caught up in the action packed story. My enjoyment of

the book was only lessened by the fact that most of the story was about Esme's situation, and I would have rather been reading about the romance between Johnny and Esme rather than the plans of one of the bad guys. All of the other Steele Street operators are briefly mentioned, but none of them are in the story much. This is also a departure from Janzen's previous books. Esme's partner, Dax, Killian, is figured prominently in Loose and Easy, and he will be the main character in her next book. The Steele Street series is one of my favorites, and I look forward to the next book.

Alyssa says

I was very interested in reading Johnny's story. Ever since he was introduced back in the very first book Crazy Hot, his story intrigued me. I must admit, it started out a little slow but by the time I hit pg. 100 it was grabbed me & wouldn't let go. The chemistry between Esme & Johnny ignites off of the page and their long history with each other truly endears them as one of my favorite couples of the series. I love that Esme is a strong kick-ass female lead that knows when she has a good man. In turn, I love that Johnny loves having that strong kick-ass female.

We are also given the beginnnings of the story for the next book between Dax Killian & Susie Toussi, which I can't wait to read about. (view spoiler)

Alex says

After drifting in another direction for awhile, here we're finally finding our way back to Steele Street with the help of Johnny Ramos' story. This is the kid that's been in the background for a lot of the stories. He's Skeeter's friend who is all grown up now and home from the Rangers and wants to be an official part of SDF. It all starts on one crazy night when he sees a hooker who couldn't possibly be Esme Alden, the good girl, valedictorian from his high school, who almost gave it up to him in the backseat of Superman's car one night and who has been stuck in his system ever since. He follows her back to her dad's PI office and from there it's a crazy night filled with fast cars, bad guys, art deals gone wrong, and just the sort of mess that always seems to happen in Denver on SDF's watch. The original chop shop boys are here, but not really on stage until the end when a certain plot line is set up leaving long-time fans with their hearts racing and a lot of OhSh*t! questions about could it really be?

Also great about this one? The introduction of Dax. You have to love a loyal man who knows his way around a Patsy Cline song.

A fun story with a great couple that is getting us back to the place we loved in this series. Steele Street.
