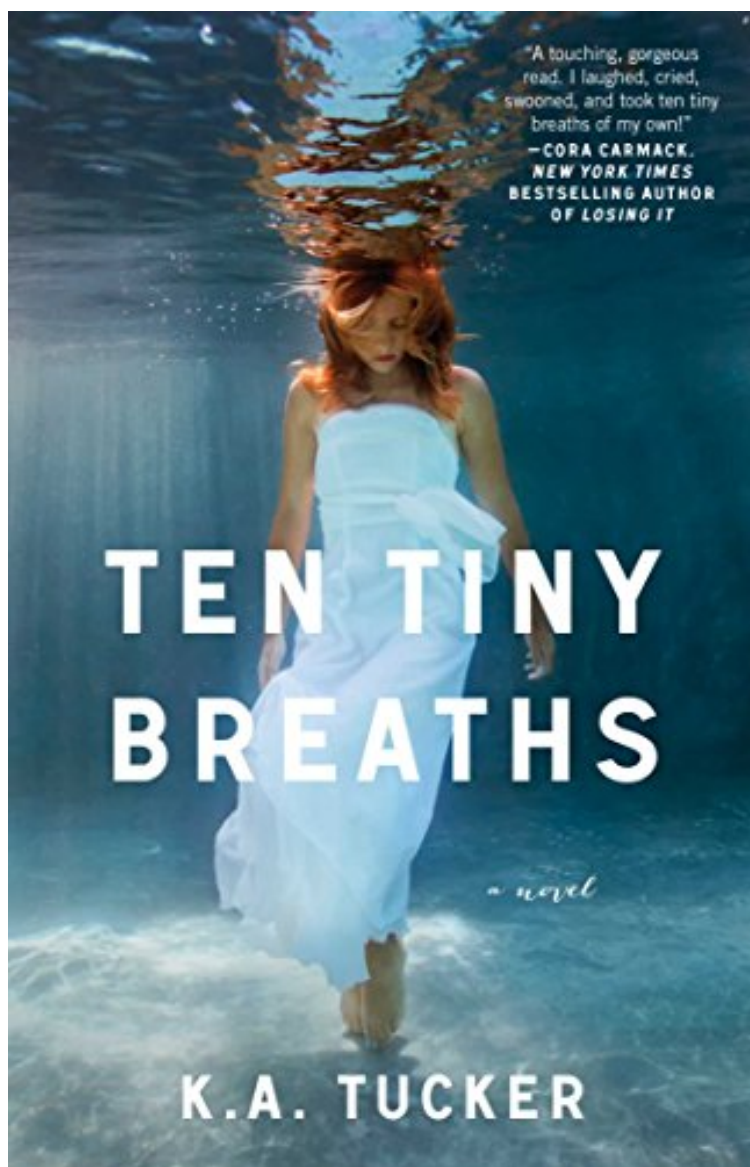


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# Ten Tiny Breaths: A Novel



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## Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurJust breathe, Kacey. Ten tiny breaths. Seize them. Feel them. Love them. Four years ago Kacey Clearys life imploded when her car was hit by a drunk driver, killing her parents, boyfriend, and best friend. Still haunted by memories of being trapped inside, holding her boyfriends lifeless hand and listening to her mother take her last breath, Kacey wants to leave her past behind. Armed with two bus tickets, twenty-year-old Kacey and her fifteen-year-old sister, Livie, escape Grand Rapids, Michigan, to start over in Miami. Struggling to make ends meet, Kacey needs to figure out how to get by. But Kaceys not worried. She can handle anythinganything but her mysterious neighbor in apartment 1D. Trent Emerson has smoldering blue eyes, deep dimples, and he perfectly skates that irresistible line between nice guy and bad

boy. Hardened by her tragic past, Kacey is determined to keep everyone at a distance, but their mutual attraction is undeniable and Trent is determined to find a way into Kaceys guarded heart even if it means that an explosive secret could shatter both their worlds. Extrait Five Ways to Fall Chapter 1 REESE Ive never seen that look on Daddys face before. Hes had it since he walked back from the pay phone. Go on, now, he urges, his gruff voice cracking. Go on inside. But... why? I whine, casting wary eyes at the truck-stop diner, empty but for a man with a Santa beard. Daddy rests his hand on the steering wheel and turns his body to face me. Reesie, baby. I dont like his tone. Its that serious one that makes my bottom lip wobble. I need you to go back inside, sit down in our booth, and ask that nice waitress for another piece of that pecan pie you like so much, he says slowly, evenly. I swallow back my tears. Alone? His face tightens, like hes mad. Only for a little bit. And then youll come in? He squeezes his eyes shut and Im afraid I just made him really angry, but... Ive never gone anywhere alone. Im only five. Remember that Daddy loves you, baby girl. Now go on.

Stifling back a sob, I slide along the old bench seat and push the heavy old Ford truck door open. Reesie, Daddy calls out as my red shoes hit the sidewalk. Turning, I see his hand wiping at something on his cheek before he gives me a wink and a smile. The truck door makes a loud bang as I swing it tight. Holding my breath, I climb the steps and push as hard as I can against the diner door, the jangle of the bell ringing in my ears. I dart across the black-and-white checkered floor and climb into our booth the one we were sitting in before Daddy called Mommy; it still has our dishes on the table just in time to see the taillights of Daddys truck disappear. When the nice waitress with the big hair comes by, I tell her my daddy will be here soon and I order that piece of chocolate pecan pie with a please and thank you. I sit in that booth and gobble it up, thinking how lucky I am to get two pieces in one night. And I wait. With my chin resting on my palm, tucked into the corner of the booth, I stare out that window, watching for the familiar blue truck to reappear, checking the door every time that bell jangles. When the kind policeman sits down across from me and asks me where my daddy is, I tell him hell be here soon. Theres no kind policeman to comfort me now. No nice lady bringing me a piece of chocolate pecan pie to combat the sourness in my mouth. But at least this time I wasnt abandoned. Im reminded of that the second I see my stepfathers face through the small glass window in the door. His salt-and-pepper hair is more salt than pepper and hes gained at least ten pounds around his waist since I last saw him nine years ago but theres no mistaking Jack Warner. I dont think he recognizes me, though. The way his steely blue eyes wander over my violet hair... my piercings... the giant Jared tattoo that coils around my right shoulder, I think hes wondering if the police officer led him into the wrong room. Im lucky that Im even in a room this time. Normally they throw you into a holding cell or make you sit in an uncomfortable chair next to a drunk named Seth who stinks of malt scotch and body odor. Im pretty sure the female arresting officer felt sorry for me. By the lethal glare she threw at Jared and Caroline as I was escorted out of Linas apartment, past their apartment door, on my way to the cruiser, the officer wasnt impressed with what shed heard of the situation. She didnt hear it from me, of course. Growing up around lawyers, Ive learned not to say a word to the police without one present. It was my best friend and next-door neighbor, Lina, who declared that the apartment I trashed earlier today is still technically mine even if my name isnt on the lease and that they should be arresting the thieving, heartless bitch who stole my husband. Unfortunately, Im the only one sitting here now. I hold my breath as I watch Jack take a seat, adjusting his slightly rumpled suit jacket on his large frame as he tries to get comfortable in the hard plastic chair. Its ironic in this moment, it feels like hes both an integral part of my childhood and a complete stranger. I cant believe I called him. I cant believe he actually came. With a heavy sigh, he finally murmurs, Reeses Pieces. Hes looking down at me the same way he did when I got caught rearranging the letters of a Baptist church sign to read something no nine-year-old girl or twenty-year-old, for that matter should have in her vocabulary.

Despite the severe strain in our once close relationship, warmth immediately spreads through my chest. I havent heard that nickname in years. So... destruction of private property? I guess the cops filled him in. I prefer to call it artistic expression. The canvas included Carolines prissy clothes, her pretentious throw cushions, and that damn pornographic picture of them hanging over our bed. Besides, I raise my hands, stained in crimson, and offer in a deadpan tone, they cant prove it was me. When Lina found me sitting quietly in the dim kitchen light of her apartment, where Ive been staying for the past two weeks, she let out a single yelp before realizing that I hadnt turned into a homicidal maniac and was in fact covered in red paint. I probably should have made the cops job harder and showered before they arrived. A tiny sad smile creeps over his face. I wonder if my attempt at humor adequately hides the crushing heartbreak and rejection that Im drowning in after finding out my husband was having an affair with his high school sweetheart. I phoned Barry on my way here. Sounds like youve kept him busy these past few years. By his clenching jaw, I see

that wasn't an easy call for Jack to make, even nine years later. Not surprising. Friends since they could barely walk, Jack and Barry were once equity partners together in his law firm. Until Barry had an affair with Jack's wife. My mother. All relationships instantly dissolved in a bath of bitterness that obviously hasn't fully drained yet. Glancing at his hand, I can't help but notice the absence of a wedding ring. I guess he hasn't remarried. After what my mother put him through, I don't blame him. And I understand why you called me now. You didn't have a choice, did you? Not really, I admit, focusing on the stars and circles I'm finger-drawing over the table's cold metal surface. Barry is a high-priced, successful criminal lawyer who has gotten his unruly stepdaughter out of more than one debacle. The last incident was on my eighteenth birthday when I decided it would be funny to go retro and moon cars. One of those cars was a police cruiser. The cop was an uptight prick. And I was drunk. After helping me avoid indecent exposure and underage public drunkenness charges, Barry announced that my juvenile record was sealed, I was now an adult, and he was officially washing his hands of me. Three months later, when my mother left him for husband number four, it really became official. I'm surprised Annabelle's new husband didn't want this swept under the rug quickly. I didn't phone Annabelle. I don't want her to know about this. I stopped calling her Mom when I was eight.

We both agreed it wasn't fitting for a woman whose true passions lay in exclusive club status and dirty martinis. My doodling finger freezes suddenly. You didn't phone her, did you? That would be like handing her torpedoes for an effective insult air strike. She had called it after all. She'd said I didn't have what it took to keep my blue-collar pretty-boy husband happy for long. Jack chuckles softly, though there's no mirth in it. No, I definitely did not phone her. What would I tell her, anyway? You weren't exactly informative on the phone. Sounds like you're in some hot water, though. My sigh of relief slides out and I'm back to doodling. That's what they tell me. When the cops started throwing around words like larceny and threats of bodily harm—things that sounded excessive and unfitting, but permanently damaging to my fresh and clean adult record should they stick—I knew I wasn't going to talk my way out of this one. It didn't help that I used the picture of Caroline for target practice during my rampage, leaving a pair of scissors strategically placed through her eyes. It's a good thing you still have that same law firm. You were easy to find. Jack folds his arms over his chest and regards me with an unreadable face. A tiny part of me—the angry little girl lost somewhere inside—is ready to burst, to demand, How could you have left me? I know why you left my mom, but how could you have shoved me out of your life so easily, too? I didn't cheat on you! But I bite my bottom lip. Pissing off the one person who can help me right now wouldn't be smart. And I need to be smart. Finally Jack leans back in his chair and says, Okay, Reese. Start from the beginning and let's see how we can solve this. I press my lips together to keep from smiling. Not because this is amusing. It's just that we've been here before. This really is starting to feel like days long since lost, when we'd meet up in the kitchen around midnight after Annabelle had gone to sleep, when Jack was finally home from work to contemplate my latest mischief over bowls of ice cream. He's even adopted the same hypnotic tone that always got me talking when my teachers, my guidance counselor, or anyone else really, couldn't. I'm pretty sure he uses it on all of his clients. Twenty minutes later, after I've given him a rundown of my situation, I hear his disappointed sigh. Working in a pet shop, Reese? Not anymore. After leaving work early with the flu and coming home to the big discovery of Jared and her in the shower—oddly enough, the more it replays in my mind, the more it begins to resemble the shower scene from Scarface—I spent a week in Linas bed, heavily sedated with Jim Beam and Nyquil. My boss fired me over the phone. I don't care. And eloping in Vegas with a guy? At nineteen years old? After knowing him for six weeks? I know that the chuckle that fills the room now isn't directed at me, even before his words confirm it; Jack's laughing at the irony of it all. And you were always so adamant that you'd never get married. I have no answer to that, except a quiet I loved him, as the painful knot forms in my throat, as I fight the sob from tearing out of me. I did. I think I still do, despite how much Jared has hurt me. Since that day eight months ago when I stepped out of my best friend Linas apartment and quite literally ran into her neighbor, a reincarnation of a mint-eyed Greek demigod, I knew that I had met my soul mate. Fireworks exploded, lightning struck, electricity coursed. All that love-at-first-sight bullshit that I didn't believe in—I instantly became a poster child for it. Common sense flew out the window with a cement block tied to its ankle. Jared said he felt it, too. And now, after six months of marital bliss, without a single warning sign, he's back with her. That rotten illness festering inside me enflames with the thought, the humiliating reality a burn that doesn't want to subside. Look, Reese. I know you've always had a wild streak in you, even as a little girl. These choices you've made since I saw you last, though, his head is shaking, possession of marijuana... trespassing... underage drinking... a fistfight? It's not really that big a deal. A lot of people drink and smoke pot in high school, I argue, adding, I'm just the one who kept getting

caught. Drag racing? He stares at me questioningly. Those were derby cars and that was totally blown out of proportion, I clarify. Jack slides his glasses off and gives his face a rough rub, looking exhausted. Its a four-hour drive from Miami to Jacksonville and he arrived here five hours after I called, meaning he pretty much dropped everything to come. I cant help but wonder why hed do that. At least I didnt get knocked up, I joke.

By the look of exasperation he shoots me, he doesnt find that remotely funny. I had hoped you were too smart to get into this kind of trouble. I guess even smart girls can make a clusterfuck of their lives, cant they? I mutter, though his words sting. Because theyre true. Theres a long pause, where Jacks mouth twists in thought as he regards me. What are you going to do with yourself now, Reese? How are you going to make up for this? When I was little, Jack always asked me for suggestions as to how I should be punished for my various childish misdemeanors. I think it was his way of getting me to agree on the outcome without looking like the harsh stepfather. I was pretty good at coming up with suitable penances and it was definitely preferable to sitting in a chair while my mother shrieked about what an embarrassment I was to her, the gin sloshing out of her martini glass with her mad hand gesticulations. But Im not a little kid anymore and Jacks not asking me to come up with a suitable punishment. Hes asking me how Im going to fix my life. All I have for him is a defeated shrug. Because thats how I feel right now. Defeated. I dont know. Get another job, I guess. What about college? The eye roll happens before I can stop myself. Jack always hated my eye rolls.

My transcripts arent exactly going to woo the administrative offices. Neither will the private school expulsion, earned when I broke into a teachers office and stole a midterm exam. Because you couldnt do the work? My arched brow answers him. Because you didnt do the work, he answers for himself, shaking his head, his face a mask of extreme disappointment. Is this how you want to live your life? In and out of police cars? Working minimum-wage jobs? In unstable relationships? Does anybody ever really want that? Jacks right. I was smart. Some may say Im still smart. But Ive made so many wrong turns along the way, I dont know how many right ones it will take to course-correct. I dont know if thats even possible. I sit in silence, listening to the monotonous tick-tick-tick of the second hand on the wall clock above, watching Jack as he spends an exorbitant amount of time playing with the gold Rolex on his wrist, his breaths deep and ragged. I dont know that I can count on him. I mean, he forgot about me once. Looking at the twenty-year-old version of who he once knew, hes probably ready to stamp lost cause across my forehead. And then he settles those kind gray eyes on me. I honestly didnt know what to expect when I arrived, but I had a long car ride up to think about it. Folding his hands together on the table in front of him, a stern expression settles over his face. I have a proposition. It comes with conditions, though. A small exhale escapes me as I chew the inside of my mouth, relief and wariness dancing together. Okay. I guess? No more, Reese. Not even the harmless stuff.

This is my first time here in years, Jack. Ironically, I convinced myself that meeting Jared was a turning point in my life, leaving me the sated and smiling wife who was happy hanging out at home and keeping out of trouble. Yes... His eyes graze the walls of the police station room. And yet here you are again. He doesnt get it. He must not have heard me. This was different, Jack! She moved in! I havent even moved out yet! All my stuff is still in that apartment! He raises his hand to silence me. You should have turned around and walked out. That would have been the mature, responsible thing to do. Instead, you let your emotions get the better of you. I smirk as another wave of familiarity washes over me. You always said I was too emotional for my own good. I did say that, he acknowledges with a sad smile. And Im still right. No more, Reese. Picking at a loose thread on my sleeve as if the topic isnt cutting into my heart, I offer casually, Well, I can definitely promise that I wont be getting married again. Ever. That earns a soft chuckle. You and me both, kiddo. A pause. You remember Mason, dont you? My geeky stepbrother who used to spend half his time scowling at me and the other half staring as if my head were about to revolve on my shoulders. I recall that the day we moved out, he watched with a bitter smile, condemning me to follow in my mothers footsteps. He despised my mother from the very first day that he met her. My pursed lips at the mention of that name has Jack smiling. Oh, yes. How could I forget? Your nemesis. Well, hes finishing law school this spring. Jack takes a deep breath and then holds it, as if hes hesitating. Why dont you come and live with us until you get back on your feet. What? Jack continues, not addressing the bewilderment that must be plastered over my face. I can get you into the paralegal program at Miami U. If you finish that, you can work for me. It doesnt have to be forever, but at least youll have something solid to put on a rsum. Its a fresh start. I... uh... Did I just hear all that correctly? His eyes drift over my hair again. You should think about a more natural color for an office environment and... His focus settles down to the tiny diamond-encrusted septum ring in my nose and he cringes. Maybe a few less piercings. But... My tongue has somehow coiled itself into a useless ball inside my mouth as my mind grapples with this offer. Its far from what I had expected. Why are

you doing this, Jack? I mean, its great and all, but why? He really doesnt owe me anything. Its enough that he came all the way out here to bail me out. Because I shouldnt have turned my back on you, Reese. I let a flash of pain betrays his otherwise calm demeanor. Lets just say Im making amends. He pauses. What do you say? I need to get out of this town. I can feel Annabellas shadow looming. He shivers for effect, making me snort. Well... My fingers rap across the table as I give my current situation that of a police station room another once-over. I have no job, no home, a shattered heart, and a pending criminal record. I should probably make the first smart choice Ive made in a long time. But... Not sure the cops will let that happen, Jack. You leave that with me. Another pause. Im riding my bike down. His mouth twists with displeasure. I assume youre not referring to one with pedals. No pedals, I confirm with a small smile. I got my motorcycle license when I turned eighteen and bought a bike a few months later. Another element of my badass self that Jared loves. Loved. Jack heaves a sigh. That shouldnt surprise me. You always did threaten your mother with getting one. Anything else I should know? Im a slob, I warn him. And a certifiable bitch in the morning. Well, I guess some things just dont change, after all. Reaching up to give his neck a slow scratch, he mumbles, Mason will be thrilled. Six months later Could we have picked somewhere more commercial? I ask dryly, draining my fourth margarita in record time as my gaze drifts over the beachside bar, complete with canopies, twinkling Christmas lights in July and too many happy, laughing people. Even with the sun setting and the light ocean breeze passing through, a light sheen of sweat coats the back of my neck. Its a typical summer night in Cancn, Mexico hell-hot. Commercial is safe, Lina answers in her distinctive flat tone. She always sounds bored to tears. I roll my eyes. Youre safer in this country than you are in our own nations capital you do realize that, right? Thats all just media hype. Tell that to the American couple who just had their heads lopped off a month ago. If I were going to tell them anything, it would be to not run drugs for the cartel, I retort. She acknowledges that with a lazy shrug as she sips on some frothy calorie-laden pink thing with an umbrella sticking out of it. Why dont we put on a pile of diamonds, jump into a random cab, and get the guy to drive us through the quiet, dark back streets of Mexico City? Lina's thin lips purse together tightly as she regards me. Its never fun to discover your best friend has a death wish. With a snort, I wave the server down for another drink. But it would be fun to watch someone try to take Nicki down. As if hearing her name from across the lounge, Nicki who I met when I answered a roommate wanted ad in the newspaper and the third member of our little Reese is turning twenty-one and is still bitter as hell so lets go to Cancn entourage, turns her head to catch our gaze from her seat on a swing by the bar. She winks as she downs another shot of tequila. How does she make that work so well? Lina mutters with a hint of envy. I know exactly what she means. All around us are flirty girls in pastel barely-there dresses and sun-kissed skin. Not Nicki, though. She sits by that bar like a femme fatale in a skin-tight leopard print dress and four-inch black heels, her platinum-blond hair coiffed like Gwen Stefani's, her red lips glaring against her pale skin, and sparkly chandelier earrings dangling from her ears. All that femininity oozing from her is counterbalanced by a full sleeve of ink and the muscular physique shes honed through her latest passion: dead-weight lifting. The tall guy talking her ear off right now? She could bench-press his two-hundred-odd pounds without breaking a sweat. That, coupled with her three-year stint cage-fighting before she switched hobbies, makes her one badass twenty-five-year-old woman. It works so well because shes beautiful and mysterious and shes not stupid enough to run off and marry some guy she met in a hallway whos still in love with his ex, I mutter around my straw, catching the wince flash across Lina's face. Its the first time Ive made any open reference to Jared since leaving for Miami, perfecting the art of denial while I impatiently waited for my heart to freeze. Our waiter places a fresh margarita on the table next to me with a wink. I force a smile and Im sure its altogether hostile by the way he hightails it back to the bar. I cant help it. He has dark, shaggy hair and olive skin. Just like Jared. You have to let it go, Reese. Its been six months. You My flat glare makes her voice falter, her words a dishonor to the very real, very raw pain I still feel. Especially today, on what would have been our one-year wedding anniversary. And is instead Jared and Carolines wedding day. Because karma hasnt been cruel enough. She quickly changes tactics. Youve started a whole new life. New city, new home. Soon, a new look... Her free hand reaches up to flip strands of my hair, reminding me that the purple will be gone the day that I return. Youve got that great new job. I roll my eyes. Its not cleaning up puppy shit and getting bitten by snakes. She taps the puncture marks on the meaty part of my thumb. A physical reminder of the day I made the idiotic mistake of sticking my mouse-scented hand into a cage to freshen the aspen chips and ended up with a two-foot-long ball pythons fangs embedded in my flesh. That happened the exact same day my sky fell. A very fitting scar. Not literally. But Ill be working in a law firm, Lina. Plenty of snakes. After we made our agreement, Jack quickly went about throwing all kinds

of legal jargon at the cops. In the end, it was unnecessary. Given the epically huge lack of judgment that Jared used sending me into that apartment unprepared to collect my things, he convinced Caroline not to press charges. So I walked out the police doors without any record of my moment of crazy. Jack let me wallow in his spacious Miami house for one week, wearing my pajamas and gorging myself on Ben Jerrys Butter Pecan ice cream out of the tub for twenty-one consecutive meals, before he tossed a bunch of application papers my way. He said, It takes four to six months for most students to get through, depending on how hard you work. You can do it all online if you want and I have a paralegal spot waiting for you when youre done. Decent pay, good people. Its just a start, Reese. Ive never had any interest in working at a law firm especially the one tainted by my mother but I had made a deal with Jack and I am smart enough to see a good opportunity. So I immersed myself in the program, using it as a distraction. Once I got into it, I actually didnt mind the course work. It took me five months to complete and I ended up finishing with a near-perfect score. I start my new job the Monday after I get back from Cancn. Oh, no. Youre having doubts. Youre going to bail on Jack. If you do, youre dead to me, Lina says. Oh, ye of little faith. Surprisingly, as unreliable as I can be at times, the thought of bailing on Jack has never crossed my mind. Fine. Lets talk about happier things. Hows Annabelle? Okay, see this? I gesture to my face, which has contorted into a mixed pucker of disgust and loathing. Sour face. Do not speak of she who must not be named. Do you want me to break into her place while she sleeps and turn her fans on? Guaranteed death, according to my people. Lina was adopted by a lovely Korean couple as a baby and raised to fully embrace their culture, including all of their death-by-fan superstitions. The fact that shes a five-foot-eleven-inch willowy blond who towers over both her parents means nothing in the Chung household. Her name is actually Li-Na, but she Americanized it in high school to make life easier. She speaks Korean fluently throwing more than a few people off and can shovel food into her mouth with chopsticks like the best of them. Weve been best friends since sophomore year, when I discovered Lina crying in a bathroom stall after Raine Higgins and her posse of bored and bitchy juniors had been bullying her. I did what any naturally spiteful high school kid who hates bullies would do. I spray-painted Raines car with Korean expletives that I found on the internet. That, along with a picture of her giving her boyfriend a blow job in a parking lot that I covertly took after stalking her at a party and glued to the inside of the windshield of her locked car with Krazy Glue, was enough to keep Lina from ever being bothered by her again. The tightness in my chest suddenly lifts with Linas attempts to sway my mood. Are you sure you and Nicki dont want a third roommate? Lina and Nicki moved down to Miami about a month ago, into a condo that Linas parents bought for her as a college graduation present. Absolutely sure, she confirms without missing a beat, her focus intent on the little pink umbrella twirling between her thumb and index finger. Linas living habits are about as opposite to mine as the Arctic Circle is to the Sahara Desert. Everything in her apartment from her linen closet to her pasta jars is tidy and labeled accordingly. Those two weeks that I sought refuge in her apartment after breaking up with Jared nearly destroyed her. Okay, enough about bad stuff. Didnt we talk about finding you a fling? I groan as I survey the crowd. I remember you talking about it and me ignoring you. Ive tried. Three strikes is enough for me. You have not tried, Reese. Admit it. Either theres an influx of douchebags or Linas right and Im subconsciously sabotaging myself. First there was Slick Steve, a senior at Miami U who showed up to our date with perfectly coiffed hair and an outfit right off the set of Grease the musical. Then there was Metrosexual Mark, a blind date from Nickis work who picked his teeth with his fork and had a weird habit of adding if it were me to 90 percent of the sentences that came out of his mouth. The final straw, though? Emilio. Good ol Spanish I-look-enough-like-your-ex-husband-that-if-you-dim-the-lights-this-might-actually-work Emilio. I might have been willing to see where it went had he not opened his wallet and laid it out on the table to proudly display his collection of extra-large Trojans, and then propositioned me in Spanish. I shudder with the memory. Im starting my harem of cats. You hate cats. True. But I also hate limes, and look at me now! I hold up my glass. Besides, Ive already found my Cancn fling. Lina, meet Mr. Cuervo. Mr. Cuervo... my best friend, Lina. Leaning in, I waggle my brow and whisper, If youre nice, hell let you call him Jose. I plan on spending the next six nights with this naughty little Mexican. I wave a hand at the server as he whizzes by, letting him know that I need another drink by pointing to my nearly empty glass, as I add, He can be a bit of a whiny bitch in the morning but he makes up for it by dark. Great. Because youre not emotional enough when youre sober, she mutters, adding with a sigh, Well, an incessantly drunk Reese should make for an interesting trip, at least. Just try not to get arrested. I hear the cells here arent as nice as the ones youre used to back home. Nicki must have been monitoring my drink levels from her perch by the bar because she saunters over with a fresh margarita in hand, either oblivious or ignoring the attention she naturally garners.

Here you go, seorita, she offers in a deceptively soft voice as she flicks her tongue piercing. I automatically roll my tongue, sensing the absence of mine. Jack hasn't outright demanded that I remove my piercings but I knew, by the way he kept cringing, that the barbell through my tongue was truly freaking him out. I removed that one out of respect, but I'm holding out on the others until the last possible moment. Jose isn't complaining about my level of intoxication, I respond to Lina, giving the rim of my glass a slow, sultry lick. I have a high tolerance for alcohol, borne from years of underage partying. It would seem, though, that lame, tourist-trap Cancun serves strong margaritas and the warm and fuzzies are really kicking in. Who the fuck is Jose? Nicki asks, her pretty face scrunching up. It's Mr. Cuervo to you. She finally clues in and that musical laugh of hers rolls out. Oh... oh, buddy! No! That's so sad. We need to fix that. Her curious eyes scan the lounge. You promised me you'd exorcise Jared from your vagina if you met a hot guy... There. The one in front. Perfect. She raises her inked arm, signaling someone as if she knows him. Oh, God. I suck back a large gulp. Seriously, Nicki. After the tooth picker you set me up with, I think I'm done. And exorcisms take at least two days to prepare for. Can't I just drown myself in frozen green goodness for tonight? I'm not even dressed for it. I'd thrown on a pair of shorts and an old faded rock concert tank. I don't even have makeup on. What do you wanna be this time? Architect from L.A.? she asks, ignoring my opposition completely. Her eyes twinkle as they flash to me. Stripper from Pasadena? I nod with appreciation. That was a good one. Before Jared, the three of us used to head out to the bars on the weekends Lina and I with fake ID. We'd make up identities: jobs, cities, sometimes names, and see how long we could keep it going while guys bought us drinks. Once, I had a guy completely sold on me being a goat herder from Iowa. He was as dumb as a bag of bricks. The shuffle of approaching feet stirs an anxious flutter in my stomach. I really don't want to carry on a conversation tonight, fake or otherwise. Helloooo boys, Nicki purrs playfully. I feel the eyes of women around us as they sit up to take notice, their rays of envy scorching my skin. I decide I can't play disinterested just yet. I need to know what type of fiend Nicki has targeted. As casually as five margaritas will allow, I turn and... slide right off my chair, my shorts providing my ass with little protection against the hard tile floor. I have shamed Mr. Cuervo, I mutter, ducking my head, the night air carrying mocking giggles my way as I accept that it's only eight o'clock and I'm way more drunk than I realized. A large hand appears in front of me, palm up. Well, I'm impressed. I hear the smile behind the masculine voice and I can't decide if I like that or not. Accepting the help because the sooner I'm off the floor, the better I'm pulled to my feet and into the broad chest of a blond with a big, obnoxious grin. Wearing a fucking red shirt.

Revue de presse "Tucker relentlessly ups the erotic ante with every encounter between Kacey and Trent...steamy romance and quirky supporting characters make this an appealing start to the series." (Kirkus) "Ten Tiny Breaths is a touching, gorgeous read. I laughed, cried, swooned, and took ten tiny breaths of my own!" (Cora Carmack New York Times bestselling author of Losing It) Loved it!! A MUST READ! I won't say any more. The shock value from the very start to the very end must be experienced blindly for full impact. Just know I think you should read it. (Maryse Black Maryse's Book Blog) This is one the best contemporary novels to hit shelves this year, and a must-read for those who love realistic stories about strong females. (Jen Lamoureux Hypable.com)