

A CHRISTMAS ROMANTIC SUSPENSE

HEIDI GLICK

12 DAYS...

ON THE 7TH DAY

The Christmas Killer

OF CHRISTMAS

MY TRUE LOVE

GAVE TO ME



Twelve Days

Heidi Glick

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to actual persons living or dead, business establishments, events, or locales, is entirely coincidental.

Twelve Days
COPYRIGHT 2023 by Heidi Glick

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission of the author or Pelican Ventures, LLC except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles or reviews. eBook editions are licensed for your personal enjoyment only. eBooks may not be re-sold, copied or given to other people. If you would like to share an eBook edition, please purchase an additional copy for each person you share it with. Contact Information:
titleadmin@pelicanbookgroup.com

All scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version^(R). NIV^(R). Copyright 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.TM Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com

Scripture quotations, marked KJV are taken from the King James translation, public domain. Scripture quotations marked DR, are taken from the Douay Rheims translation, public domain.

Scripture texts marked NAB are taken from the *New American Bible, revised edition* Copyright 2010, 1991, 1986, 1970 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Washington, D.C. and are used by permission of the copyright owner. All Rights Reserved. No part of the New American Bible may be reproduced in any form without permission in writing from the copyright owner.

Cover Art by *Nicola Martinez*

Harbourlight Books, a division of Pelican Ventures, LLC
www.pelicanbookgroup.com PO Box 1738 *Aztec, NM * 87410

Harbourlight Books sail and mast logo is a trademark of Pelican Ventures, LLC

Publishing History
First Harbourlight Edition, 2023
Electronic Edition ISBN 978-1-5223-0436-4
Published in the United States of America

Dedication

This story is dedicated to my husband, John, who has always been supportive of my writing.

What People are Saying

Praise for *Dog Tags*:

"This gripping suspense story has well-developed, realistic characters, and a scintillating plot line. I couldn't put it down until I'd finished it!" - Marcy G. Dyer

"Breakout author, Heidi Glick, scores with a brilliantly fast-paced romance infused with a mystery that has twists and turns you'll never see coming."

- Suzanne Hartmann

"Heidi Glick accomplished her mission with *Dog Tags*. Her debut novel is a great mix of suspense, mystery and romance...." - Carole Towriss

"A Great Blend of Romance and Suspense in the Same Arena as Brandilyn Collins." - Julie Arduini

Praise for *Hold for Release*:

"Another life affirming thrill ride by Heidi Glick. Her latest novel, *Hold For Release*, tackles tough topics like infertility, adultery, and marital strife. With a deft hand she weaves a suspenseful story that empowers women and injects faith in the deepest darkness. A must read!" - Kelly Anne Liberto, author of *Stealth*

PROLOGUE

Thou shalt not kill. Exodus 20:13

Scott Newton slouched in his Army green two-person tent and whittled the small chunk of wood. The camp counselor had given it to him earlier when he arrived at the wooded Ohio campsite on the edge of Blanchardville. But his new hobby didn't drown out the noise of the other campers. At eleven, wasn't he a little old for something like this? He huffed. His twelve-year-old neighbor already had a BB gun. Instead, he was stuck here with a tiny whittling knife. Light grew dim inside the tent, and Scott turned on a lantern.

A red-haired man's head peeked inside the tent. "Uncle Bob?" He was still here? He'd brought Scott to camp and chatted with the counselor while another camper helped Scott set up his tent. *The other kids' dads probably helped them put up theirs.* He bit back a snuffle.

Uncle Bob blinked. "Hey, Scott. I'm about to leave. But I'll make sure someone picks you up at the end of camp."

A fish logo adorned his uncle's t-shirt. One of those Jesus fish things. Scott knew a little about Jesus from when Mom would take him to the Evangelical Free church in town, along with Uncle Bob and Aunt

Margaret. On Christmas. At Easter. Any time Dad would go out Friday night and not come back until late Sunday.

Uncle Bob sighed. "You can't hide in here all night, buddy. I'm sorry about what happened. I have to leave soon, but I hope you come out soon and hang out with the other boys."

Sorry didn't bring back the little league game he'd missed. The game he couldn't get back. Besides, he had little in common with the other guys. They had dads. Ones who loved them.

"You ready to come out?" Uncle Bob glanced at his watch and then at Scott.

Scott met his uncle's gaze. Uncle Bob meant well, but he'd only heard Dad or Mom's side of the story. "It was the last game. The last game!" Sure, he was the shortest guy on the team. Scott gazed at his left hand, which held the whittling tool. But the other pitchers in the area were all righties. Not southpaws like him. He grinned and kept whittling and then swallowed hard. At least he had something to be proud of.

"The last game. Yeah, that's what your mom said." Uncle Bob frowned. "I'm sorry. Your mom can't drive right now because of her seizures. And it sounds like your dad got busy and...."

Scott set down his whittling tool and wood and crossed his arms. "Yeah, busy." He rolled his eyes. "He'll just do it again. You can't trust him."

Uncle Bob raised a brow.

Scott turned away and muttered. "He drinks. Mom... she covers for him. She says, 'He provides for

us. At least he doesn't hit us.'" Scott shifted his gaze over to his uncle again. "But when he drinks, he forgets. He doesn't keep his promises. He...."

"I'm going to have a chat with your mom. I can't make you leave this tent, but I'd encourage you to come out and have fun. It stinks that you missed that game. I wish I could make it up to you, but I can't. But staying in here won't change it either."

Uncle Bob withdrew his head from the tent.

Scott peeked outside. "Wait. Thanks for talking to her." Had he said too much? Would Mom be angry he'd told Uncle Bob Dad's secret?

Uncle Bob waved. "Sure thing, Scott. Remember, God loves you. And so do your aunt and I." His uncle stared straight ahead. A serious look spread across his face.

"Hey, camper," a guy with a nametag that read Carl said. A scar grazed his chin. "Welcome to Camp Terry. The other boys are by the campfire. We're about to toast marshmallows. You ready?"

By now, the sun had set, and the campfire provided the only outdoor light. "Yeah," Scott followed Carl to the campfire and settled onto a log. A short, skinny boy with glasses to his right smiled and handed Scott a large campfire fork and a bag of marshmallows. The same boy who'd helped him put up his tent.

"Thanks." Scott placed two marshmallows on the end of the fork.

"Don't put them too close to the flame. They'll burn fast." The boy grinned.

"Thanks for the tip," Scott said.

"Is this your first time camping?" the boy asked.

"Uh, yeah." Not that he hadn't wanted to before, but money was tight. Funny how Dad always had money to buy beer though. Scott balled his fists. Yet the man was still his dad. Scott pictured what it would have been like to sit around a campfire with mom and dad. Just the three of them. Like a normal family. He blew out a breath.

"You burnt them," the boy said.

Scott winced as he shifted his gaze to the blackened and singed goo that sagged toward the flames. He waited until the marshmallows cooled before removing them from the camping fork.

"Try again. It's okay. Mistakes happen." The boy smiled.

Scott put two more marshmallows on the fork and put them near the fire, but not too close.

"Who wants to tell a story?" Carl asked.

"I do." A big dude with muscles and hair shaved short above his waved.

Carl nodded. "Okay, good. I have to run to the cabin, but I'll be back soon."

Big Guy shifted on his log and set down his fork. "It was on a night like this. Eleanor Clark went camping. Around a campfire, much like this one. Her friends went off to use the restroom. One by one. And so Eleanor sat at a campsite. Maybe this one. On logs like ours. And when her friends came back..." He paused. "Eleanor. Was. Gone."

"Huh?" a red-haired, freckled kid, marshmallow

hanging from his mouth, asked.

Big Guy balled his fists and then spread out his fingers. "Poof. She was gone. Taken."

"What do you mean?" Freckles asked before finishing his marshmallow.

"Taken by the Christmas Killer," Big Guy said.

"The Christmas Killer?" Scott chuckled. "I've heard this urban legend, too. My dad would wrap gifts and tell me the Christmas Killer was roaming, so I better not sneak down the stairs and unwrap gifts." More likely, Dad had been drinking and didn't want Scott to see.

Big Guy glared at Scott. "Oh yeah, well then, what happened to Eleanor?"

Scott shrugged. "Maybe she ran away." This story was lame. Sort of like the whole day had been. Except for maybe when he'd gotten to spend some time with Uncle Bob.

"What about the others?" Big Guy asked.

"Maybe they moved away and didn't want to tell anyone," Scott said. He understood the feeling.

"At Christmastime?" Big Guy narrowed his gaze.

"There were o-others?" Freckles pulled up his knees closer to his body and wrapped his arms around them.

"Four people went missing back then. The bodies were never found." Big Guy looked around the campfire at each person. His gaze ended on Scott. "Look, there he is now!" Big Guy pointed behind Scott and ran. "Aghh! Run!"

Scott scrambled to his feet and shot a glance

behind him. "Aghh!" He took off and then stopped when Big Guy laughed. Scott turned around. It had only been Carl.

"Is everything okay?" Carl glared at Big Guy. "You're not telling the story about that woman again, are you? I told you. She was never even at this campsite."

Big Guy chuckled and pointed at Scott. "You should have seen the look on your face, man."

Scott kicked the ground and hurried back to his tent. His feet pounded the trail but failed to drown out Big Guy's snorts.

Inside the tent, Scott dove into his sleeping bag, rolled onto his side, and stared at the tent wall.

Lame. Completely lame. All of it.

Footsteps sounded outside. Was Big Guy stopping by to rub things in? Scott rolled over to face the tent opening.

Another head poked inside his tent. The kid with the marshmallows. "Can I come in?"

"I guess," Scott said.

He sat up, and the boy joined him inside the tent.

The boy extended his hand. "I'm Robby."

"I'm Scott."

"Nice to meet you."

Scott leaned closer to Robby, who held a book. The side of it was blue. "What do you have there?"

Robby pointed to the cover. "Ever read this series?"

Scott shook his head. He didn't get to the library much either. His school had one, but if the books there

were like the ones he had to read in class, they were all boring. "No, I don't read much."

"Hold on." Robby left the tent and returned with a second book. He handed it to Scott. "You'll like 'em. The series is about these two brothers who solve crimes."

"Hmmm."

Big Guy cackled in the distance.

"Thanks." Scott took a book from Robby and studied the cover. The cover picture featured two boys. One had lighter hair. the other, darker hair. They looked like they were hiding. The picture was sort of spooky looking. So... stories where people solve crimes. Like Uncle Bob, a detective. Couldn't be any worse than having to listen to Big Guy amuse himself.

Scott moved his lantern closer and cracked the book open. Boys as amateur detectives. Maybe he could be a cop when he grew up. Help people, just like Uncle Bob.

1

Fourteen Years Later, Thursday, February 5

Standing near the reference desk at the Blanchardville Library and handing out Chankoc County Sheriff's Office badge stickers to children was a highlight of Officer Scott Newton's job. Maybe not the most exciting assignment, but part of making friendships and helping kids to see officers as community helpers and not enemies. Cold wind blew into the building every time a patron opened one of the front doors. Still, warmth flooded him as he'd handed the kids their stickers and smiles spread across their faces. The weather proved to be on par for this section of northwest Ohio for this time of year. Colder than the milder winter of last year.

Two elderly men walked by him. One had a newspaper tucked under his arm. The second nodded hello to Scott.

The men stopped a few feet away from Scott and kept talking. "Another one missing." The man with the paper opened it and pointed to the front page. The other man leaned closer to take a look.

The voices of two young boys arguing filled the air. Scott shifted his gaze to the drinking fountain on the other side of the reference desk where the two boys

congregated. He approached them. "Hey boys, would you like a sticker?"

The shorter one grew quiet and tried to hide behind his friend.

The taller one stepped forward. "Sure."

Scott handed them each a sticker.

Tall boy thumbed to his friend and continued, "He doesn't believe me that there's a Christmas Killer."

Was that story still making the rounds? Scott fought back the urge to roll his eyes.

"Scott," someone said.

He shifted his gaze away from the boys and toward the neighboring section of the library. His uncle hurried toward him.

"I think my uncle needs help." Scott looked back at the boys. "Be good and stay out of trouble."

Uncle Bob huffed and puffed, almost out of breath.

Scott's dad had a heart attack several years earlier. All the drinking hadn't helped his body any. Was Uncle Bob about to go into cardiac arrest, too?

"Is there a problem, Uncle Bob?" Scott asked. Should he call an ambulance? Though only five years older than Scott's dad, Uncle Bob wasn't getting any younger. Scott's gaze shifted to the AED device on the wall behind the reference desk.

Uncle Bob cleared his throat and thumbed toward the section of the library containing books for adults. "There's a situation." He scratched his beard—red hair mixed with gray. Uncle Bob was the only one in the family who didn't have dark hair.

A situation? Not a medical emergency, maybe

something criminal. "So what is it?" Scott turned and followed his uncle away from the main checkout area. As a retired officer, if Uncle Bob said there was a problem, then there was one.

Uncle Bob pushed his glasses up higher and then leaned closer. "See Lindsay?"

Scott followed Uncle Bob's gaze to an attractive blonde with shoulder-length hair. She stood in the distance and leaned over Aunt Margaret who sat at a table near the new books section.

Scott shifted his back to Uncle Bob. "The woman talking to Aunt Margaret?"

Uncle Bob nodded. "Lindsay Billings. She's the one with the problem."

Scott lifted a brow. Maybe Lindsay was a librarian. "Public urination in the library elevator? Kids writing in books?"

Uncle Bob scrunched his nose. "No, no, no. Lindsay needs a date for the Valentine's Day dinner at church."

"Um, that's not actually an emergency, Uncle Bob." Scott stole another glance at the woman. "Besides, as pretty as she is, I'm sure she'll find one soon." He pulled his gaze away from Lindsay. She exuded an inner beauty. Something about the way she smiled at his aunt as she spoke to her. A kindness about her.

"That's the thing," Uncle Bob pushed his glasses up again and continued. "Lindsay hasn't found a date yet. Her father is a bit intimidating, and her brother," Uncle Bob moved his thumb near his forefinger,

“Tends to cause a bit of trouble...”

Billings? Oh, *that* Billings? Her father, Stewart Billings, owned multiple businesses in the city and was one of the wealthiest men in the area. “So Wade is Lindsay’s brother?” Yep, that might explain the lack of a date.

Uncle Bob nodded. “Now do you understand?”

“She goes to our church?” Scott asked and peeked at Lindsay who looked up from helping Aunt Margaret and smiled at him. *Huh*. He’d never seen Lindsay at church before. But he attended when his work schedule would allow. His law enforcement hours were probably different from hers. Assuming she worked. As a Billings, it wasn’t as if she needed to.

“Yes,” Uncle Bob said. Rather eagerly. How many times had he rehearsed these lines? The old man cleared his throat.

Scott shifted his gaze to his uncle and rubbed his chin. “Um, does she want to go to the dinner?”

Uncle Bob pointed at him. “I think you should ask.”

Scott raised a hand. “I... Um.” Wouldn’t approaching a woman he didn’t know in a public place, especially in uniform, appear forward?

Uncle Bob narrowed his gaze. “Didn’t I give you a job recommendation?”

He’d given more than a job recommendation. Talked mom into getting her and dad some help. And took Scott to church, where he’d found Jesus.

Uncle Bob stared. “Well? Can’t you do this for me? Just this once?” He gave Scott a gentle push in

Lindsay's direction.

Scott bit back a chuckle. "For you?" Scott glanced at Aunt Margaret, who now waved and smiled at him. She grinned and nodded toward Lindsay and then mumbled something to the woman. *Oh, boy.* He was stuck.

Uncle Bob walked away toward his wife, and Lindsay approached Scott.

She folded her arms, and that beautiful smile of hers faded. "Is everything okay, officer?"

Uh-oh. "Yes, why—?"

"I'm a volunteer here at the library. Is there something wrong, or are you looking for a particular book? Margaret said you needed to ask me something." The brows above Lindsay's bright blue eyes furrowed. Scott inhaled the faint scent of vanilla.

He scratched the back of his head. "Did she now?" He paused. "My aunt likes to play matchmaker."

Lindsay's cheeks flamed. She bowed her head. "I'm so sorry."

"Don't be. You really don't have a date for the church dinner?" Given her father's money, he could buy her one.

"No, I don't." She tucked her hair behind one ear.

You hurt her feelings, jerk. Think fast. "Um, you know, neither do I."

Her mouth fell open.

"Wanna go?" If she was a Billings, she'd turn him down fast, and he could move on. He'd fulfill his obligation to his uncle. No one in the Billings family dated anyone in public service. But at least he'd be

polite.

She smiled. "I... I would love to."

Wait, what? He blinked. Would her father be okay with this? "Uh, I'll pick you up half an hour before the dinner?"

The corner of one side of her mouth lifted in a bashful, lopsided grin. A dimple stood out on her cheek. "Sounds good to me." She walked over to the table where Aunt Margaret sat. Atop it, set a little bin that contained paper scraps and pencils. Lindsay grabbed a paper and pencil, scribbled on it, and then handed it to Scott.

The paper contained a phone number, along with an address. Interesting. Not the area where her parents lived.

Scott walked away and cast a glance backward. He caught Lindsay looking at him. Her cheeks flushed again. Scott bit back a smirk. Sure, sometimes Uncle Bob could be curmudgeonly, but maybe he and Aunt Margaret's interfering wasn't so bad after all.

2

Thursday, December 13

At least work was over. Scott hurried out of the office and into the insurance firm's parking lot. He bit his lip. *If nothing else, I have a more normal work schedule now.* Fairly normal, weekdays only four, ten-hour days. Good thing he had tomorrow off.

Scott eased the accelerator of his car as he traveled along the vast stretch of the interstate. His gaze shifted to the dash cam Lindsay has gotten him for his birthday. A unique but thoughtful gift. Like everything she did. Who would have thought her father would have allowed her to work as a nurse? Then again, maybe Stewart Billings held out for his daughter obtaining a position in management. Not to mention, he could no doubt use more connections in town. Would he be more accepting of Scott now that he had a new job?

Scott hurried home to get ready to meet Lindsay for dinner and head over to church for the Winter Family Night of Fun and Worship service. Today wasn't Sunday, but the pastor often held special services around the holidays. The worship team would lead the music, and then the pastor would dismiss everyone to the social hall for a time of fun and

fellowship. The grownups socialized, and the children decorated gingerbread houses. Attending meant Scott could apologize for his argument with his girlfriend earlier. But it also meant going to the house of God. A place he'd rather avoid right now. He loved God. Which made it harder to understand. *Why God? Why?*

He gripped the steering wheel a bit too tightly, and pain shot up his left arm. Somehow, even though Scott had resigned from his position as a deputy, the wounds from Officer Cole Linville's recent death still dug deep.

Scott blew out a breath. He'd push aside his feelings and go to church for Lindsay, if nothing else. Things had felt right between the two of them until recently. Could they regain their earlier feelings? Maybe time and a career change could heal all wounds. That and physical therapy. Scott shifted his gaze to his left arm and blew out a breath.

The problem wasn't Lindsay. She wasn't the one who'd changed.

Light snow fell on the interstate, but it didn't stick. After Scott took Exit 157, he headed onto State Route 12 toward his house. He parked the car in the garage and then hurried outside and over to the mailbox. Uncle Bob, or more likely, Scott's aunt, had decorated the box for the holidays. Plastic ornaments adorned the outside, along with a small set of multicolor LED globe lights. They blinked in unison, all except one, which refused to glow. He knew the feeling. He hadn't felt like shining much himself lately.

From inside the metal container, Scott extracted