



CAN SHE TRUST THE MAN WHO BOTH KIDNAPPED
HER AND CLAIMS HE'S SAVING HER LIFE?

Award-winning Author
WENDY DAVY
UNDERCOVER
Justice

From the author of *NIGHT WAVES*, *A MATTER OF TRUST* & *YOU CAN'T HIDE*
comes another spine-tingling story of romantic suspense

Undercover Justice

Wendy Davy

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Dedication

To my readers with big dreams. Grasp onto hope. You
never know what tomorrow may bring.

What People are Saying

Deadly Chase ~ 2013 Inspirational Readers Choice Award Finalist

"Ms. Davy crafted 232 pages of perfectly balanced action, spine-tingling suspense, and heart-tugging romance in *Deadly Chase*. A word of caution, though. Once you start reading, you won't want to put it down until you read the last word!"

~ Dora Hiers

You Can't Hide ~

"*You Can't Hide* had me hooked from the very beginning and didn't let me go until the last page was turned. It was like watching an intense movie where you find yourself wringing your hands and taking quick breaths..."

~ Sherry ~ Love 2 Read Novels

Night Waves ~ Night Owl Romance Reviewer Top Pick

"This is a very entertaining inspirational romantic suspense! Very enjoyable!... I like how Ms. Davy focuses on one fundamental lesson rather than diverging into several. This is a good romantic suspense that I think anyone would enjoy as a very satisfying read!"

~ Martha E. ~ You Gotta Read Reviews.

"As water reflects the face, so one's life reflects the heart."
Proverbs 27:19 NIV

1

Breathless, Skylar Hart stared at the computer screen.

Was this a cruel joke?

She refreshed the online banking web page. Same results. This wasn't a hoax. The transaction was real. The money set aside for the women's shelter was gone—all of it. To make matters worse, the account fraud had originated from her office computer's IP address.

The authorities would investigate, and when they did...

She would be the prime suspect.

How could God allow this to happen? She had given her life to Christ. She was His now. Weren't things supposed to be easy for Christians?

Lord, why now? I was so close to earning a solid reputation.

Skylar's heart thudded fast and loud as she scanned the office building's fifth floor. At half past nine on a Friday night the other employees at her uncle's real estate firm were long gone. She'd stayed late to tie up loose ends before the weekend. The last item on her list, processing Uncle Winston's monthly charity donation, should've taken only a few minutes,

and it would have if not for finding the savings account compromised.

What would the shelter do without the funds? What would her uncle think? He'd trusted her when others had shunned. But, would he believe her to be trustworthy after this? If not, the authorities would follow the path of least resistance. Why would they bother to search for the true thief when they had a perfectly good suspect thrown into their path?

Her head began to throb. The backs of her eyes burned. Skylar straightened her spine and blinked away tears. She had to contact Uncle Winston, convince him she had nothing to do with the missing money. Then, he could direct the authorities toward finding the real culprit.

Skylar shut off her computer and pulled on her jacket. Thanks to casual Fridays, she sprinted across the floor in sneakers, the commercial gray-and-burgundy carpet silencing her footsteps. The phone rang at her desk. The unexpected sound jarred her frazzled nerves.

Should she answer?

No. She had to go. She approached the elevator, finger shaking as she punched the down button. The light glowed within, but she pressed the control a second time.

How had things gone so wrong? Moving to Forest Lake was supposed to be a respite from her past; and it had been. Until now.

The elevator chimed, and the doors opened. She rode to the lobby and exited into the foyer. Florescent lights reflected off the polished tile floor, and a colorful flower arrangement adorned a pedestal in the room's center. The security desk flanking the entrance stood

empty, the security televisions turned off. Was she alone in the entire building?

She hastened her steps, glancing toward the darkness which loomed beyond the floor-to-ceiling windows. Shivers wracked her body and hairs stood on end as if someone was lurking beyond the main doors, watching. Had the thief come to silence her? No one could possibly know she'd discovered the missing money. Could they?

Shaking off her unease, Skylar hurried across the wide open space and shoved through the double doors. As she stepped onto the sidewalk, Virginia's crisp autumn air surrounded her, and she zipped her jacket. The doors closed behind her, the automatic locks engaging.

She scanned the dark, wet streets. When had it rained? Puddles formed on the black asphalt and overhead streetlamps reflected off the placid surfaces. Headlights speared the night as a full-sized cargo van cruised along the street. Tempted to rush across to the parking garage before the vehicle approached, Skylar stepped off the curb, but then thought better. She retreated and paced the sidewalk.

The driver applied the brakes, and the van slowed.

Her patience thinned. Couldn't they see she was in a hurry? Skylar waved them on but instead of continuing past, the van pulled to the curb and stopped. The throaty exhaust rumbled as the engine idled. Tinted windows concealed its occupants and instincts urged her to take precautionary measures.

She took a few steps back, clutching her purse.

The side door swung open. A tall, dark clad figure sprang out, his combat boots splashing into a deep puddle as he lunged forward.

Oh, God. Help me.

Skylar turned and dove toward the building.

The man gained ground, fast, his heavy footsteps approaching without mercy. He was close. Too close. She drew in a breath to cry for help. His gangly arm encircled her neck, pressing tight and cutting off her emerging scream. His scent—a pungent combination of sweat and grease—assaulted her.

Skylar threw an elbow into his gut and reared back her head. He grunted as her skull connected with his face. He was stronger than he looked; he held tight, dragging her toward the van as he spewed foul words.

Adrenaline surged. She fought. Twisting. Striking. Kicking. She tried to dig into her purse for pepper spray, but the bag slipped and smashed onto the sidewalk. She wrenched toward it, but the man held tight. Inch by inch, he hauled her closer to the vehicle.

Wet concrete hampered her efforts to dig in her heels. Panic, raw and intense consumed her as her abductor climbed inside, pulled her in behind him, and then shoved her deep into the interior.

Darkness swallowed her as she fell backward onto the van's cold, corrugated steel floor. Pain erupted, shooting up her backside and into her spine. Skylar gasped for breath as she took quick inventory: One driver. One assailant. One open door.

Freedom lay only a few feet away. She fisted her hands, preparing to fight her way out.

As if anticipating her thoughts, the man's eyes narrowed into slits and then his gaze travelled over her shoulder. "Hold onto her. I'll get her purse." He disappeared outside.

The air shifted behind her. Masculine, rugged aftershave filled the chasm surrounding her—she

wasn't alone in the back after all. Outnumbered by at least three to one, she'd miscalculated her odds. In a final, fleeting attempt she lunged for the door but rock-solid arms wrapped around her shoulders preventing escape.

2

Slade Marshal did what he was told—he held the woman immobile. But the feat wasn’t easy. Although much smaller than his six-foot-two stature, she had an undeniable will to live. She bucked against him and dug her fingernails into his thighs.

Peeling away her fingers, Slade dipped his head. “Don’t fight me.” The moment she’d landed in his arms, he had become her best chance of survival. But he couldn’t tell her that. “It’s going to be all right.”

The woman’s answering scream vibrated his eardrums—of course, she had no reason to believe him. Slade didn’t even know if he could follow through.

Father, let my words be true.

Ike Mayhew returned with the purse and slid into the passenger seat as Aston Barnes smashed the gas pedal. As the van surged forward, the woman screamed again.

Ike looked over his bony shoulder. “Keep her quiet, Cowboy.”

Slade bristled. Why the numbskull insisted on using that nickname, he’d yet to figure out. He was born and bred in Virginia, had never worn cowboy boots or a Stetson. “You didn’t tell me we were picking up an extra passenger.” He kept his voice cold, remote. “You come back here and deal with her.”

Barnes glanced into the rearview mirror. “Ike grabbed her because I told him to. Keep her restrained

until I can make other arrangements.”

A shiver coursed through the woman’s body, and she fought against Slade with renewed strength. He didn’t want to hurt her, but he couldn’t outright show her mercy. Barnes would consider that weakness, and Slade couldn’t afford to risk losing the man’s trust now.

Slade slid his palm over her mouth, pressing his calloused skin against her warm, soft lips. She let out a whimper and hot tears trickled over his hand, a testament to her growing desperation.

He steeled his nerves. It would be easy to whisper his true identity, to alleviate her fears. But, in order to save her, she’d have to believe he was one of them—she’d have to believe he was capable of anything.

As Barnes made various turns, passing street lights illuminated the woman’s long, strawberry blonde hair. Slade tensed; Winston Hayworth’s daughter had the same hair color. And, this woman had the same height and build as the heiress. About five seven. Slim, but curvy figure. Had Barnes kidnapped this woman thinking she was Willow Hayworth? Or had he hatched an alternative plan Slade didn’t know about?

Barnes’s sudden detour complicated matters. This situation jeopardized Slade’s entire mission, and Barnes had already destroyed too many innocent lives, had claimed too many victims. He didn’t want this woman added to the list.

Slade studied her. Delicate features accentuated her heart-shaped face. Wide, frightened eyes begged him to provide a way out. She kept her gaze steady on his, and hope sparked within her sea green irises.

Could she sense he had a conscience?

3

As they travelled away from downtown, streetlights no longer lit the van's interior, and darkness concealed the compassion in Cowboy's eyes. Doubts erased Skylar's fledgling hope. She couldn't harbor false expectations. She'd probably misread the empathy in his expression. Why would this man have compassion for her? Men like him—cold, cunning, ruthless—didn't have human emotions. She hadn't found a weak link. He was with them, and he had her under his control.

But why had they taken her? Was this related to the stolen money or was it a random act? Something worse, perhaps? Human trafficking? The mere thought sent fear jolting throughout her body. But, she couldn't succumb. She had to keep her mind sharp and focus on details she could relay to the authorities once she escaped. And she would get away. She had to.

Although she couldn't see much in the dark, she reviewed what she could remember about the men, noting details she needed to clarify. The driver wore a knit cap. What color was his hair? Ike, the lanky man who'd grabbed her from the street, had a mole on his right cheek, or was it his left? He had a scar across his narrow forehead. How long was it?

Cowboy, on the other hand, needed no further investigation. She clearly pictured his rugged features in her mind—features she might consider handsome

had they met under different circumstances. Intense, cobalt blue eyes showcased determination and experience. His angular, clean shaven jaw held underlying strength. His nose, slightly bent, led down to well-defined lips that had uttered quiet reassurances. His voice, low, untamable, had distinct qualities that set him apart. He'd spoken cold, harsh words to the men in front, but when he'd whispered in her ear his tone held subtle vibrations that soothed rather than provoked.

The man proved to be an enigma. A team player—yet set apart. Could it be his motives didn't fully align with the others? Regardless, Skylar prohibited hope from rising. Cowboy was with them, and that meant he was dangerous.

The driver turned from smooth pavement onto a gravel road. The van bounced across the uneven ground, jerking her from her thoughts. She estimated they'd travelled about thirty minutes. Her tears had dried, but moisture gathered beneath Cowboy's palm as he continued to hold her silent. Had she broken into a sweat, or had he?

Cowboy shifted as if anticipating...something. What could this brawny man be nervous about? He had the upper hand. But circumstances could change. Skylar eyed her purse. If she could reach the pepper spray inside, she'd have a fighting chance. Too bad Ike had tossed the bag out of reach.

She tested Cowboy's hold only to find his strength unyielding.

"Easy now. When we get there, stay close to me," he urged.

Yeah, right. Given an opportunity, she would put as much distance between them as possible.

Skylar endured the van's jostling until the driver slowed. He pressed a button on a rectangular box and a garage door wound upward. Light spilled from inside a large, high-ceilinged building. With the van's interior illuminated, Skylar searched for a makeshift weapon, but the cargo area held nothing but dented steel, dust, and a stale, musty odor. She renewed her struggles.

"Relax, princess." The driver pulled into the building, shifted into park and cut the engine. The interior fell silent. "You're not going anywhere until we have what we need." He pressed the remote again, no doubt closing the door behind them.

What could they possibly want? She didn't have money. Then again, they'd taken her from outside the office. Could these men think to use her as a path to Uncle Winston's fortune? If so, they had another think coming. Skylar jerked her head to the side, freeing her mouth from Cowboy's grip. "Let me go. I will never betray my uncle."

"Uncle?" The driver twisted in his seat. He looked to be in his mid-forties with a square face and deep creases around his eyes. Catching his first solid look at Skylar since she'd been taken, his lips curled into a grimace, and then he let out a colorful expletive.

Ike turned to look, too. His face paled and his jaw went slack.

Cowboy loosened his hold. She tore from his grasp. His questioning gaze zeroed in. "You're Hayworth's niece?"

Who exactly did they think they'd kidnapped?

She had no time to analyze their reactions. Answers would come later. For now, she must escape before Cowboy recovered and took hold again. She

lunged for the side door, shoved it open and stumbled out. She hit the cement running, sneakers pounding against grimy ground.

The two-story structure looked like an old warehouse or a defunct automotive repair garage. About a hundred yards wide and twice as long, the wide open space appeared to have been abandoned long ago. Rusty metal rafters exposed drooping air ducts and tangled electrical wires. Paint peeled from faded walls. Scents of stale grease competed with musky mold and mildew.

Even if someone discovered her missing, no one would think to look for her here. Heart pounding, Skylar ran faster. But, oddly, no footsteps followed. She dared to glance back. The men had exited the van and now stood—three in a row—watching from a distance.

If they weren't bothering to chase her...there must be no way out. But there had to be. A building this size would have more than one exit. Skylar slowed her steps, spun in a circle. The cinderblock walls had a few windows, but all were broken. The remaining jagged glass made them too dangerous to pass through. Other than the large automatic door the van had entered through on the front side, three standard doors lined the back wall. She ran toward the one marked emergency exit, pushed against the handle half expecting an alarm to sound, but nothing happened—the door didn't even budge.

Skylar tried the next door, but a lock kept it in place. She attempted to open the third but to no avail. The men had been prepared. They had her trapped.

Deep, raised voices echoed across the empty space. She turned, flattened her back against the door.

"Bring her to me, Cowboy." The driver tossed aside his knit cap and raked a hand through his dark brown hair before grabbing Ike's shirt collar. "You fool. I don't need complications like these."

Ike spouted excuses—for what she didn't care—as Cowboy took long strides in her direction.

Dressed in black, tall and imposing, he intimidated even from a distance as his gaze targeted her.

Skyler spun around, shoved the door's handle again but only managed to rattle the frame. She placed her damp forehead on the cold door. *Lord, help me live...*

She took in a breath. Exhaled.

Cowboy's footsteps grew closer.

Straightening her spine, she faced him. "I won't go down without a fight." She lifted her chin as if she could stop him with sheer will.

He halted a few feet away, nodded. "I believe you." Something sparked in his eyes. Perhaps a glimmer of respect? Did it matter?

Skyler needed to disable him. But, how?

Cowboy pulled his lower lip between his teeth and looked her over as if debating how to handle her. Finally, he held out a hand. "Come with me."

Her gaze flickered toward the men across the room. "What are they arguing about?"

He kept his hand extended, but crooked his fingers. "Remember what I said. Stay close."

She shook her head. "Make me."

His lips quirked for a brief moment. Then he sobered, stepped forward.

Skyler propelled away from the door, lunged toward the left and then dodged to the right. He must have anticipated her move; he caught her before she'd

taken three steps. Tossing her over his shoulder, he carried her toward the others.

She huffed out a breath as pain erupted in her stomach, his muscles rock hard beneath her ribcage. She pounded his back, kicked and squirmed. "Put me down."

Cowboy continued walking, unfazed. She might as well have been pummeling a bulldozer.

She changed tactics. "Please, you're hurting me." She added a high-pitched waver to her voice.

He paused and set her down. She stumbled as she gained her bearings. He grasped her arm, steadying her as his gaze swept over her. "It'll all be over soon."

"That's what I'm afraid of."