

HIDDEN IDENTITY BOOK 1

NO ONE TO TRUST

A NOVEL

LYNETTE EASON



a division of Baker Publishing Group
Grand Rapids, Michigan

Lynette Eason, *No One to Trust*
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Dedicated to my fabulous editor, Andrea Doering,
and my super agent, Tamela Hancock Murray
of the Steve Laube Agency.

Thank you for believing in me and my stories!

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PROLOGUE

SATURDAY MORNING

8:02 A.M.

NEW YORK CITY

“You killed him!” David Hackett pulled his fingers from the still pulse of the man who lay sprawled on his partner’s office floor. Blood pooled beneath the man’s head and his empty eyes stared, fixed on the ceiling.

Sam Gilroy slid the gun into the top drawer of his desk and sat down in the leather chair. “It’s Saturday. You weren’t supposed to be here this morning.”

“Well, I am!” He’d heard the gunshot from his office across the hall and burst through the door to find . . . this. A sight his brain was having trouble processing.

Sam spread his hands. “He was going to the building inspector. I couldn’t let that happen.”

“Going to the inspector about what?” David stepped aside to avoid the blood. This was not happening. It was a bad dream and he was going to wake up any minute.

But no. His partner studied him. “I caught him going through

my laptop. He found out about some of the materials we've been using to build with, claimed they were substandard, and said it had to be stopped. I assured him everything was aboveboard, but he was having none of it. Said he had proof and was going to shut us down."

David swallowed hard. He'd just learned about the substandard materials and had been trying to decide what to do about it. One of the reasons he'd come in to the office this morning. Sam usually worked Saturday mornings and David had been planning on confronting the man. Only, he'd gone to his office first. To plan, figure out how to approach Sam. Now a man was dead because of his hesitation. Sickness filled him. "So . . . murder?"

"You have a better idea?" Sam's hands shook when he clasped them in front of him on the desk. David realized his partner wasn't quite as unaffected as he was trying to portray. "Look, you know as well as I do, if we hadn't found cheaper suppliers, this company was going under."

"That's just not true. When I left for my last assignment overseas, we were doing great, had a comfortable profit margin." He'd been gone longer than usual, that particular mission a delicate operation that had gone wrong in so many ways. By the time he'd come home, Sam had made some catastrophic business decisions. David rubbed a hand down his face. "I can't believe this." He paced from one end of the office to the other, careful not to step in the blood staining the wood floor. "Do you know who his father is?"

"I know who he is. Trust me, he won't be a problem. Don't worry about it."

David stared at Sam. "Trust you? Don't worry about it? There's a dead guy on the floor of your office and you're sitting there like you're about to have tea with the queen. What about his family? He's got three kids, Sam."

Sam placed his hands on the desk and leaned forward. "Then he should have kept his nose out of my business." Sam shot him

a ferocious frown. “What’s wrong with you? It’s not like you’ve never killed anyone.”

David flinched and held in his vicious desire to wrap his hands around the man’s throat. “I was in the Army, Sam. I didn’t kill anyone who wasn’t trying to kill me.” And he still saw their faces in his dreams. David made an effort to unclench his jaw. “I was protecting our country so people like you could sit in a fancy office and make money hand over fist.” He glanced at the man on the floor. “And we’d still be doing that if you’d kept things status quo.”

“It’s your money too, partner.” Sam shot him a sly look. “Or have you gambled it all away in the six months you’ve been home?”

David had to leave or he was going to do great bodily harm to the man he’d once considered a friend. But he had to know. “What are you going to do with him?”

“Get rid of him. The Hudson River has swallowed its share of evidence over the years. One more piece won’t be a big deal.”

David sucked in a deep breath. How did Sam sleep at night? David admitted he’d done a lot of rotten things in his life, even things that were borderline illegal. And yes, he’d killed in self-defense, but he’d never murdered anyone. Unsure of his next move, he shook his head and headed for the door. “Just make sure when he’s found, it won’t come back to bite us.”

“Who says he’ll ever be found?”

David stared at Sam for a moment, then lowered his gaze to the dead man. “Right.”

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THURSDAY
4:45 P.M.
FOURTEEN MONTHS LATER
CHARLOTTE, NC

He'd been found, and if he didn't think fast, he was dead.

Computer technician Kyle Abernathy didn't move from his position under the desk as he formulated a plan. His brain moved at light speed and his pulse pounded with the sudden rush of adrenaline.

He never imagined installing a computer would be the thing to save his life. Kyle scooted a little farther under the desk, yet not so far he couldn't see. Satisfied he was hidden from anyone looking in his direction, Kyle plugged in the last cord and watched the man with the square jaw and blond hair stop to question one of the workers in the cubicle across from the bathroom.

Corbin Hayes, one of Alessandro Raimondi's cohorts. Kyle would have recognized him anywhere—even though over a year had passed since he'd last seen the man.

The question was, how had Corbin known where to look for Kyle?

He pulled his cell phone from the back pocket of his pants. Getting out and finding a safe place should be priority. But he

wasn't thinking of himself. He was thinking of his wife, Summer. Beautiful, innocent Summer.

The thought of them finding her made him nauseous. Kyle was three hours away from home. He'd planned to drive home early and surprise her, as she wasn't expecting him until tomorrow morning. But he'd finished this job ahead of schedule and was ready to see his wife.

Now she was in danger and he had to get to her and get her away from the threat that was sure to come. If it hadn't already.

He glanced at the touch screen and pressed the numbers that would send the distress signal to his handler, Mike Thomas. Then he rose with caution, his plan to slip out unseen, call Summer to get somewhere safe, meet her there, and wait for Mike to call him.

Kyle gripped the phone and waited to see which way Corbin would go. The man turned right toward the CEO's office. Kyle went left, grateful the CEO had been busy on his phone twenty minutes ago and had motioned for Kyle to come back later.

Only later would never happen for Mr. CEO. It was time for Kyle to disappear again.

The only problem was, Corbin Hayes never traveled alone. Kyle glanced around and saw no sign of anyone else that had Kyle's demise in mind.

That bothered him. Did Corbin have his goons covering all of the doors? Possibly.

He backed toward the exit, knowing he had to chance it. It wouldn't be the first time he'd been in a tight spot and had to fight his way out.

His back touched the stairwell door that led to the parking garage. His mind filtered through questions he had no answers for. Did they know which car was his? Was someone watching it? Had they already planted a bomb on it?

No, they wanted him alive.

For the moment.

If he died too fast, they couldn't torture him.

Or use Summer to get information from him. To find out exactly how much he knew and what he'd told the authorities.

Corbin stepped out of the CEO's office and Kyle had no choice. He backed out the door and spun to face the stairs, ready to defend himself.

Blood rushed through his veins, adrenaline kicking along. The area before him was empty. He took a deep breath.

The door clicked shut behind him. Up or down?

Up led to the roof where he could be trapped.

Down led to the car and escape. Or where Corbin's men could be waiting.

He went down. He had to get to Summer.

Kyle descended the stairs on light feet, senses tuned in to the air around him. Danger pulsed. Fighting instincts surfaced, making his nerves hum. At the bottom, he stopped and took a slow, deep breath. He listened.

Heard nothing. No pounding feet above him. Nothing outside the door.

He pushed the door open and stepped into the parking garage, unclipped his name tag from his shirt pocket, and ditched it in the nearest trash can. Next went any IDs in his wallet. He couldn't afford to have any identification on him should he be caught. The car was registered to a young man who'd died three years ago. When there was nothing on him that could lead anyone back to Summer, Kyle headed for the vehicle. His breath became visible, the temperature was dropping. The middle of November had arrived with a cold front, but his shiver didn't have anything to do with the weather.

Footsteps of people hurrying to their cars on a Thursday afternoon at five o'clock. Kyle didn't bother to relax. Corbin wouldn't let a few people get in his way of kidnapping Kyle in broad daylight.

A woman with a toddler in her arms hurried past him.

A man with a briefcase in one hand and a cell phone attached to his ear stood at the driver's door of a black Lexus.

Kyle's gaze darted, registering faces, expressions, body language. So far, he was in the clear.

He made it to the black Honda, slid behind the wheel, and cranked the vehicle. As he backed from the parking spot and headed out of the garage, his gut hurt. It had been too easy.

Something wasn't right.

He dialed Summer's number and waited. Then realized his phone wasn't working. He tried again as he dodged cars in the left lane while watching the rearview mirror for a tail.

The phone still didn't ring. With a groan of fury, he felt the first stirrings of real fear. They'd jammed his phone, cut off his service, whatever. "How?" he whispered. Had Mike gotten his trouble call? If not, that meant Summer wouldn't even get a warning that danger was heading for her doorstep.

He made a left turn, got a quick flash of silver a second before the car slammed into the passenger side of the Honda. Kyle heard the crunching sound of metal on metal, felt the airbag explosion slam into his face. Blackness threatened. Bolts of pain shot through his head and down his neck.

His heart thudded, not for fear for himself, but for the woman he'd come to love. The woman who'd said, "I can take almost anything, Kyle, but don't ever, ever lie to me. I could never forgive that."

The woman who was about to find out his entire existence—and hers—was a lie.