

THE CATCH



US MARSHALS



LISA
HARRIS

Praise for *The Chase*

“A heart-pounding, seemingly never-ending (in a good way) chase to the conclusion of the novel. The anticipation builds until readers crash into the novel’s finale.”

Life Is Story

“This whirlwind, fast-paced chase will please fans of Terri Blackstock.”

Publishers Weekly

“The second book in the US Marshals series picks up right where the first left off with all the action, drama, suspense, and romance a book lover could ask for! . . . The US Marshals books are by far my favorites by Lisa Harris.”

Write-Read-Life

Praise for *The Escape*

“An excellent thriller with well-drawn characters and the suspenseful start to Harris’s new US Marshals series.”

Booklist

“There are so many unexpected twists and turns that I was engaged from beginning until end. I can’t wait for the next book in the series.”

Relz Reviewz

“This story gripped me from the very beginning and didn’t let go. Of all the Lisa Harris books I have read, I would easily say

this is my favorite and one I recommend to readers who like a high-thrill ride with characters they can relate to and a story that will keep them on the edge of their seat late into the night.”

Write-Read-Life

Praise for *The Traitor’s Pawn*

“Harris presents a fast-paced adventure that balances intriguing clues, complex suspects, light romance, and messages of forgiveness to create an excellent, entertaining read.”

Booklist

“Lisa Harris never fails to bring an action-packed, adrenaline-filled romantic suspense to her readers.”

Interviews & Reviews

Praise for *Deadly Intentions*

“A story of corruption and greed, but also a story of romance and healing.”

Compass Book Ratings

“Lisa Harris never fails to amaze me with her high-intensity, adrenaline-fueled, action-packed plots and beautifully crafted characters racing against time and enemies to find the solution to a looming threat.”

Interviews & Reviews

Books by Lisa Harris

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a division of Baker Publishing Group
Grand Rapids, Michigan

© 2022 by Lisa Harris

Published by Revell
a division of Baker Publishing Group
PO Box 6287, Grand Rapids, MI 49516-6287
www.revellbooks.com

Printed in the United States of America

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Harris, Lisa, 1969– author.
Title: The catch / Lisa Harris.
Description: Grand Rapids, MI : Revell, a division of Baker Publishing Group, [2022] |
Series: US Marshals ; 3
Identifiers: LCCN 2021023641 | ISBN 9780800737320 | ISBN 9780800741075
(casebound) | ISBN 9781493434176 (ebook)
Subjects: GSAFD: Christian fiction. | Suspense fiction. | LCGFT: Christian fiction. |
Thrillers (Fiction)
Classification: LCC PS3608.A78315 C37 2022 | DDC 813/.6—dc23
LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2021023641>

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The author is represented by Hartline Literary Agency, LLC.

Baker Publishing Group publications use paper produced from sustainable forestry practices and post-consumer waste whenever possible.

22 23 24 25 26 27 28 7 6 5 4 3 2 1



Hé'd lied to her again.

It was her fault for believing him in the first place. For trusting the slew of promises he never kept. He told her he loved her. Told her he'd leave his wife for her so they could be together. Becca played the fool and believed him. She knew now that he never intended to stay with her, and as far as she was concerned, he wasn't capable of being faithful. Today was no different, and yet he called and she came running.

She sat in her car, watching the gated house where he lived with *her*, trying to gather her frayed nerves. While she'd never been inside the five-thousand-square-foot house, she knew it included a chef's kitchen, a vaulted back porch, and a three-car garage. The apartment she shared with their son was less than a thousand square feet. Robert paid for the majority of her expenses, but it was never quite enough, so she continued to work at the café and relied on his handouts and promises that he was going to leave his wife for her.

She gripped the steering wheel and frowned. The reality was that she didn't care about the big house. She wasn't even sure she loved him anymore. She cared only about their son.

Her son.

She drew in a deep breath as the gates swung open slowly. Then she parked, got out of the car, and headed to the front door. It was strange that he'd asked her to the house. He'd never done that before. The closest she'd gotten was when she'd driven by one time. She'd wanted to know where he lived and spent his time when he wasn't with her. She felt guilty about their arrangement since the beginning, but Robert had swept in and given her the feeling of family she'd never had. Saying no seemed impossible until she realized that it was nothing more than a fairy tale that could never have a happy ending.

Still, as much as she wanted to, she never found the courage to walk away.

Until now.

Today, all of that would change. No matter what he said, she was going to tell him that she was leaving him. She was tired of the tangled web she'd found herself in as the scorned mistress who could never show her face at his office or at one of his political fundraisers. She'd seen the coverage of him and Myra on the news last night, smiling into the camera as if they didn't have a care in the world. She had once believed that could be her standing next to him one day. His expression had told her otherwise. He would never give up his life for her.

Becca put her hand on the brass doorknob, then stopped. Was she supposed to walk in or knock?

She didn't have to answer the question because the door swung open.

Robert's wife, Myra, stood in the doorway, a smile plastered on her face. "Becca Lambert . . . It's nice to finally meet you in person, though I guess you weren't expecting me to be here."

"I don't understand." Becca studied the woman's pale blue

pencil skirt, button-up white blouse, and matching jacket that likely cost more than what she earned in a month. “How do you know me?”

“I’m not near as clueless as Robert thinks I am. I’m the one who sent you the message from his phone. Well, his . . . other phone, that is.” She sneered. “I thought we could . . . talk.”

Becca took a step backward, fighting every instinct in her body that told her to run. “I’m not sure that’s a good idea.”

“It won’t take long. Just a few minutes. It’s time you and I got to know each other.”

She didn’t want to talk to Robert’s wife. Didn’t want to be in the same room with the woman. “Where’s Robert?”

“At work. Or so he says. He’s always working, but you don’t really think you’re the only pretty girl who’s caught his eye, do you?”

Becca blinked back tears as she tried to stuff down the guilt. She’d been working at an upscale restaurant when she met Robert. He was handsome and charismatic, and he paid attention to her. She’d grown up in foster care, and for the first time in her life, she felt loved. Special.

Then she found out she was pregnant.

There was nothing she could do to change their understanding. He promised to pay the bills as long as she promised to be quiet. His wife was never to find out. None of his associates could be confided in either. No one could know he was the father of her baby.

Becca shook her head. “I need to leave—”

“I wouldn’t if I were you. I know everything about you and Robert, including the fact that you had his son.”

Becca’s mouth went dry. “Robert told you that?”

Myra motioned her inside. “It didn’t take much detective

work to find out where he really spends his time away from me.”

“I made mistakes,” Becca said, stepping through the imposing entryway to a boldly decorated living room that was far too gaudy for her taste, though the red-and-coral theme seemed to fit Myra perfectly. “But you have to understand that I didn’t know he was married when I first started seeing him.” By the time she found out the truth about Robert’s marital status, she’d already lost her heart.

Guilt pressed against her chest. How many times had she told herself she needed to walk away? How many times had she chastised herself for not taking her own advice?

Myra’s smile disappeared as she turned around in the middle of the room. “Don’t play innocent with me.”

“I’m not,” Becca started to argue, then stopped. She had no idea what this woman wanted from her, but clearly Myra wasn’t interested in a string of apologies.

Myra narrowed her gaze. “You need to know that I have the ability to make your life extremely miserable, but . . . I’m going to offer you a onetime deal.”

Becca’s fingers clenched her purse strap. “What do you mean?”

“I will give you enough money to leave Seattle and start over. I don’t care where or how, as long as it’s far away from here.”

Becca forced herself to relax her hands, but she couldn’t absorb what she was hearing. “You want to pay me off?”

“You make it sound so . . . so illicit.”

“Isn’t it?”

Myra’s glare seemed to pierce through her. “No more illicit than sleeping with someone else’s husband.”

Becca’s gaze dropped to the expensive rug on the wooden

floor, then followed the dark-orange squiggly pattern along the edge. Nausea swept through her, making her feel like she would vomit. She should have known this day would come. Nothing good ever came from keeping secrets.

“You’re going to walk away and never contact Robert again. And”—she tapped her manicured fingers together—“you will sign over parental rights of the baby to Robert.”

Becca’s head shot up. “I won’t do that.”

Myra’s brows rose. “Then you don’t understand how things work. Without money and power, you’re nothing but a waitress working overtime for tips. If you try to fight me, you’ll lose.”

“No.” Becca straightened her shoulders, determined to dig up enough courage to fight back. “You can’t buy me off.”

“Then you’re more foolish than I thought,” she said, her voice cold. “Robert doesn’t love you, Becca. He never did. Not really. You’ve been nothing more than a temporary distraction.”

“I’m not taking your money.”

“Then I’ll need to find something to persuade you.”

“What do you mean?”

“I know you left your son with his sitter this morning,” Myra said.

Becca’s heart pounded in her chest. If Myra did anything to hurt her son, or Ava . . .

“What did you do?” Becca asked.

“It’s not what I’ve done, it’s what I will do if you don’t cooperate. You will sign the papers I’ve had drawn up, giving Robert full custody of the child, and walk away with the money.”

“No—”

“You seem to think you can fight this, but you can’t. Robert will hire the best lawyers in the city, and in the end, you will

still give up your rights to your son. Now it's just up to you to decide if you take the money or end up losing everything."

Becca stumbled backward. "No. I'll never give up my baby."

She grabbed her handgun out of her purse—ironically, the gun that Robert had bought her. There wasn't time to think through the consequences. All she knew was that she wasn't going to lose her son.



Falling was inevitable, but it was also a skill that worked against every instinct. Madison James held her right hand on the brake of the belay device and watched from the ground of the indoor climbing gym as her sister reached for the blue handhold above her.

“Just a couple more inches,” Madison yelled up to her.

Danielle’s foot slipped.

From the ground, Madison held tight to the safety rope to keep her sister from falling. “You good?”

Danielle blew out a puff of air. “For the moment.”

“You’re a natural,” Madison said.

“That would explain the rope burn on my leg and the scrape on my arm.”

“Go up a couple more feet, then we’ll work on the fall.”

“I don’t know . . . I’m still not sold on the idea.”

Climbing was as much mental as it was physical, and trust of your spotter was essential. Madison had already taught Danielle the basics of climbing, but taking it one step further meant pushing herself past her comfort zone. In her own life, climbing had helped her conquer fear, because the more

prepared she was, the more she was able to handle whatever her job as a US Marshal threw at her.

“It seemed like a good idea when I was on the ground, but from up here—”

“You’re doing fine, Danielle.”

The muscles in Madison’s arms twitched as her sister shifted some of the weight. All Danielle needed was a few more inches and she’d reach the top. Her mind ran through the suggestions she’d given Danielle. If done properly, her fall would go smoothly. If she ended up getting tangled in the rope, her leg could catch on it and flip her upside down, something neither of them wanted.

Madison took in a deep breath as Danielle got to the thirty-five-foot mark. She needed to be high enough that the rope was able to stretch. High enough that she wouldn’t hit the ground while avoiding a route with any obstructions.

Danielle reached for the last handhold while Madison held the belay rope steady. “I can’t get a grip.”

“Yes, you can. It’s just like a puzzle.”

“You know I hate puzzles.”

“Reach up and grab hold. Trust your instincts and stay focused. You’re almost there.”

Danielle pulled herself up and firmly grasped the handhold.

“When you’re ready, I want you to fall,” Madison said. “Trust me.”

The word *trust* reverberated through Madison. She’d never been good at giving up control to someone else. Doing things right meant doing things herself. But climbing forced you to trust more than just your skills. You had to trust that your harness was secure and would hold you. That the belayer below was ready to catch you. That the bolts were secure and the

anchors were set, and that the rope was strong enough to hold you if you fell.

Not an easy assignment for someone needing to be in control.

Danielle pulled her knees up level with her hips while Madison gave the rope some slack, keeping an eye on her sister. Madison was the counterbalance whose job was to ensure Danielle didn't swing down too fast and slam into the rock.

"Make sure you look where you're falling," Madison said. "Know where the rope is and aim to fall straight down."

"You make it sound so easy."

Danielle blew the air out of her lungs and then, seconds later, pushed off the wall. Madison waited for the right moment, then jumped as the rope pulled her up. She braced her feet against the wall. Another few seconds and they were both on the ground.

"You did good up there," Madison said.

"That was both terrifying and exhilarating at the same time." Danielle braced her hands against her thighs. "I think I know why you like to come here."

"So you're finally a believer?"

Danielle laughed. "I think I still prefer jogging, but this might be growing on me."

"Seriously, you're a natural."

"Ha. You're the natural adrenaline junkie."

"I'm thinking you're ready to try heading out to Darrington some weekend."

Danielle dropped the chalk bag she'd been using to keep her hands steady onto the ground, then bent over to stretch her calves. "Challenge accepted."

Madison knew her sister was ready, but indoor climbing

on the wall she'd just scaled was nothing like climbing a rock face. Here routes were marked by colors giving defined places to grab or step on to. Mapping out a clear path in the outdoors was more of a mental game.

Just like mapping out a clear path forward in life.

Madison frowned at the thought. She'd never expected to be a widow before she was thirty. Life had thrown the unexpected at her, but just like when climbing, she was determined not to give up.

"Madison?"

"Sorry." She turned back to her sister. "Do you want to go up again?"

Danielle started pulling off her climbing harness. "Yes, but I probably need to get home. Ethan's with the kids, but he needs to go in to work."

"That's okay." Madison glanced at her watch. "I've got a bunch of stuff to do today as well."

"On your next day off, I'll get Ethan to watch the kids and Daddy. We'll make a day of it and head out to Darrington."

Madison smiled as they headed to the locker rooms. "It's a date."

"Daddy loved going to the flight museum with you, by the way," Danielle said.

"Not as much as I did. Especially in the moments when I felt like he was there again with me."

"It might not be as often as it used to be, but he's still in there."

Their father's downward spiral had been hard on all of them, but while Alzheimer's might have stolen parts of him away, there were still those fleeting moments when they were able to see glimpses of the man he used to be.

Madison grabbed her stuff out of her locker and quickly changed back into her street clothes. So much about these past few years had been both unexpected and painful. Her husband's murder, Daddy's diagnosis with Alzheimer's, and her getting shot. But not everything had been bad.

Four months ago, she'd remet Jonas.

She squeezed her eyes shut for a moment. When they first started working together, she hadn't been looking for a relationship. There were too many loose ends surrounding Luke's death. She needed closure, and yet somehow, she'd found herself falling for Jonas. He'd made it clear that he wanted her in his life permanently, even if he had to wait for her.

"Hey." Danielle's fingers brushed her arm. "Are you okay?"

"Yeah. Sorry." She grabbed her jacket out of the locker. "I'm just a bit preoccupied, I guess."

"Does this have anything to do with Jonas?"

Madison frowned. Her sister could always read her, but Jonas wasn't the only thing that had her preoccupied today. She pulled on her jacket, knowing there were things she couldn't tell Danielle, like the eerie feeling she hadn't been able to shake that someone had been following her over the past few weeks. She'd tried to blame it on being overworked, but she knew she was going to have to talk to her boss at some point.

"Jonas got into town last night," she finally said.

"Have you talked to him?"

She sat down on the wooden bench to pull on her boots. "Just on the phone last night. He stopped to see his mother on his way home and was pretty tired. But I promised to cook him dinner tonight."

"Aww . . . that sounds romantic."

She hadn't been surprised when Jonas had told her he was

planning to interview with the Marshals' Special Operations Group. The monthlong training was vigorous. Those who passed were allowed to continue their full-time duties with the US Marshal Service, while remaining on call 24/7 for special missions that included apprehending fugitives, protecting dignitaries, and providing court security.

Danielle pulled her bag out of the locker. "What is your heart saying, Madison?"

"I'm still trying to figure that out."

"Maybe the real question is what's stopping you from figuring it out?" Danielle's question hit its mark. "It's obvious Jonas is crazy about you, and from everything you've told me, you feel the same way."

"It's complicated. You know that." Madison rubbed a hand over her face. "I'm not ready to make a commitment. Not until I know without a shadow of a doubt that I'm not putting his life in danger."

"Nothing can change what happened the day Luke died, but Jonas can take care of himself—he's a trained marshal, in case you forgot. You're not protecting Jonas by pushing him away. You're only hurting yourself. And him."

Madison's defenses rose. "I'm not pushing him away, Danielle—"

"Are you sure about that? Because your answer sounds more like an excuse."

She pressed her lips together, glad there was no one else in the locker room at the moment. "Whoever shot Luke—whoever shot me—is still out there. I can't just ignore that. I was the target, and until they're caught, Jonas is as well."

Danielle frowned. "So you're simply trying to protect him?"

Madison nodded, but her sister clearly wasn't buying her

response. Danielle might not understand but getting shot by an intruder in her own home had shaken Madison. Especially knowing that whoever had pulled the trigger had also shot and murdered her husband.

“All I know is that Jonas would risk his life for you,” Danielle said, “and he’s not afraid of whoever’s still out there.”

But I am.

The thought took her off guard. How was it that she could risk her life chasing down fugitives but not stop whoever had killed her husband and shot her?

“I’m sorry.” Danielle squeezed her shoulder. “I know this isn’t easy for you. I just want you to be happy. And I know it’s easy for me to say, but nothing you do can change what happened to Luke. Don’t start second-guessing the past. It never works.”

Madison knew she was right, but that didn’t make it any easier.

“Can I give you some advice?”

Madison finished tying the second boot, then planted her feet on the floor. “If I say no, you’ll give it to me anyway.”

“Funny. I just spent about an hour up on that wall, and to be honest, for most of it I was terrified. And yet nothing happened.”

Madison stood. “What are you trying to say?”

“Let yourself be vulnerable by exposing yourself to the fear when it comes to your heart. As I fell, I realized that I could trust both you and the rope and harness holding me. I was also reminded that God is like our rope and harness. He didn’t give us a spirit of fear. He calls us to trust him. And I’m not just talking about when climbing.”

The analogy might be good, but emotions were more complicated than that. They were messy and sometimes ugly, and

no matter how hard she tried, taking the plunge still seemed out of reach. She knew she couldn't expect Jonas to wait for her indefinitely. She was going to have to take that step forward at some point. She just wished the fear didn't seem so impossible to overcome.

She caught her sister's gaze. "I know you're right, it's just not always easy."

"Things worth fighting for never are."

Madison pulled her phone out of her locker, wishing she could control her emotions as tightly as her climbing moves. She checked her messages. Her boss, Chief Deputy Carl Michaels, had called three times.

"I've been trying to get ahold of you," he said as soon as her call went through.

"Sorry I missed your calls. I came early to the gym to do some rock climbing with my sister."

"I know you'd planned to take the day off, but I need you to come down to the courthouse."

"Okay. What's going on?"

"A threat was made against several judges and prosecutors, and we need to have additional security in place in case they decide to follow through."

"Who's behind the threats?" Madison asked.

"Maxim Cervantes's boys. His arraignment is scheduled for today."

Madison snatched her keys out of her locker, then glanced at her watch. "I can be there in twenty minutes."

"Is everything okay?" Danielle asked after Madison ended the call.

She put her phone in her pocket. "Just a security issue at the courthouse."

“Promise me you’ll be careful.”

“Always.” She shot her sister a smile. “Don’t worry.”

“About your job as a marshal or your love life?”

Madison laughed. “Both.”

“You know I can’t help it. Are they calling in Jonas as well?”

“Michaels didn’t say, but I wouldn’t be surprised.”

“Nothing like jumping back into work after a month of training.”

Madison’s heart fluttered at the thought of seeing him again, but this wasn’t about her or Jonas. As a Deputy US Marshal, one of her jobs was to ensure the protection of judicial proceedings, which included protecting federal judges, jurors, and other court officials. And when it came to combating active threats, there was no margin for error.