

HIDDEN IDENTITY BOOK 3

NO PLACE TO HIDE

A NOVEL

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Lynette Eason, *No Place to Hide*
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Dedicated to my family
and to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.



PROLOGUE

*FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 20
ATLANTA, GA
CENTER FOR DISEASE CONTROL*

“It’s time,” the voice said. “Remember what we told you.”

CDC employee Anwar Goff wanted to rip the small piece from his ear and stomp it into oblivion. But his tormentors had been very clear about what would happen if he did so. “If at any time we can’t hear you, they will die. Ask for help, they will die. Write a message, they will die. Use your phone, they will die. Am I clear?” So Anwar left the earpiece alone and slipped from the bathroom. His footsteps echoed on the tile flooring as he walked down the empty hall.

CDC Building 18 had shut down about an hour ago. Anwar moved with slow strides that all too quickly ate up the distance between the bathroom and the Biosafety Level 4 lab. Sweat threatened to drip into his eyes and he drew his left arm across his forehead.

With shaking fingers, he swiped the key card and the first set of doors opened, then closed behind him. For a moment,

he just stood there, trembling. “God, help me,” he whispered, then moved once again.

“God can’t help you. Only I can,” the voice whispered, then gave a brusque laugh. Evil clung to the words and Anwar clamped his lips shut.

Once inside the changing area, he set his briefcase on the bench next to the lockers and drew in a deep breath. He couldn’t help the stifled sob that slipped from him as he opened the third locker from the left.

Don’t think, just do it. Within seconds he was in protective clothing complete with mask, gloves, and gown.

Next, he rolled the combination on the briefcase to unlock it. With short, faltering steps, Anwar left the changing room and approached the next set of doors. He swiped his card again. The doors opened with a soft whoosh and he stepped into the BSL-4 lab.

His target lay in the locked freezer just ahead. Muttering another prayer, he crossed the room, opened the freezer door, and found what he’d come for. He paused and swallowed hard as he simply stared, feeling paralyzed. Helpless. For the past seven years, he’d worked his way up the ranks of the CDC, gaining the confidence of his superiors. And now all of his hard work had brought him to this.

“We’re waiting. Your family is waiting.”

He thought of his wife and two teenage children. With another deep breath, he reached into the freezer. Carefully, he transferred the tray that held the one-inch-long plastic vials topped with the plastic screw caps. The vials sat in seven little white cardboard boxes. One by one, he removed the boxes and placed them in the black case. There they would be kept frozen by the dry ice during transport.

Anwar snapped the briefcase closed and rolled the combination to lock it.

He'd done it. He'd really done it. Tremors raced through him as he glanced at the clock on the wall. He had very few minutes to spare, but he wasn't quite sure his legs would be able to carry him back through the two sets of doors. He didn't move. Couldn't. He simply couldn't do this. "I can't do this," he whispered.

"But you will."

Yes. He would.

So this is how he would go down, how he would be remembered. *Don't do it!* But the faces of his children, his wife rose up before him. He squared his shoulders and tightened his grip on the bag.

He left the lab, not looking back, not thinking about all of the people who would soon die. He was only thinking of the three people he was trying to save. With hurried, erratic movements, he entered the lobby and waved to the security guard who barely looked up from the computer. "Night, Anwar. See you next week."

Anwar didn't answer, just strode through the glass doors and out into the night. He shivered as the wind cut through his heavy coat. Even Atlanta had its fair share of cold weather.

For a moment Anwar hesitated. If he went left—

"Why aren't you moving, Mr. Goff?"

Anwar jerked. They were watching him. He moved to his car and climbed in. He placed the briefcase on the seat beside him. Just earlier that day, his wife had sat in that spot and they'd talked about their plans for Thanksgiving. His parents were coming, but hers couldn't make it. With a tight throat and tears in his eyes, he cranked the car and pulled from the curb.

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SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 22
9:00 P.M.
NORTHEAST ATLANTA SUBURB

One down, one to go. Breaking into houses had never been on her top ten list of things to do with her weekend, so when she found herself picking the deadbolt on Ian Lockwood's two-story home this chilly November evening, Jackie Sellers had a hard time ignoring the adrenaline rushing through her veins.

Finally. The soft snick on lock number two told her she'd done it. A thrill shot through her. Lock-picking had been one skill that she'd worked hard on, but wasn't very good at. Not that she used it that often. But occasionally it came in handy.

Like now.

Shoving aside the self-congratulations, she twisted the knob, placed her fingertips on the wood, and slowly pushed. The door opened inward without a sound.

Apple spice and cinnamon air freshener greeted her. Jackie slipped inside and shut the door behind her carefully. Softly.

The house was quiet. Silent. Yet she could almost feel the tension surrounding her. Which was silly. Houses didn't have

tension. Only the people in them. She took note of the layout. Stairs straight ahead. Kitchen to the right.

A cologne she couldn't identify tickled her nose. A sound to her left. She stiffened, turning her head a fraction in order to probe the darkness. With only a sliver of a moon in the sky and the blinds closed on every window, the black in the house was deep, broken only by the small nightlight in the foyer. To her left, she could make out the shadows of the furniture in the den. The rectangular windows on either side of the fireplace.

She listened. Where had the noise come from? Definitely to her left.

Her heart pounded. Should she call out and identify herself? Make the first move in an attack? Or just wait? The air shifted and she moved.

A lamp crashed into the wall where she'd been standing a split second ago.

Movement in front of her.

Coming straight at her.

No time to dodge it. She dove for the dark shape and slammed against a rock solid chest.

A grunt.

They both went to the floor. Her right hip connected with the hard wood. Pain shot through her and she gasped.

She rolled and he lunged after her. His hard breaths came just inches from her face and his hands clamped down on her upper arms.

Instinct, training, and fear combined to give her the strength to break his hold and lash out with the palm of her hand. She aimed for his nose, hoping to drive it into his head. Instead, she thought she caught his chin.

“Ah!” His hold broke and she rolled to her feet. He did the

same and moved fast. She caught a blow to the stomach and went back to her knees.

A hard fist landed on her shoulder and she couldn't stop the cry from escaping her lips.

She struggled for breath even as she searched for the front door. He was strong and knew the layout. She was hurting and couldn't see.

Time to run.

She rose to her feet and whirled for the exit as he moved in for another hit. She ducked and spun. His fist whistled past her nose, and she knew if he managed to connect with her face, she was down for the count. She tripped and went down, her knee kissing the floor with a hard thud. She cried out and rolled, scrambled up and to the door. Her fingers wrapped around the knob.

“Oh no you don't,” he barked.

A hand grasped her shoulder and gave a hard jerk. She went down again, this time slamming her elbow against the floor. Pain shot through her arm.

But she'd recognized the voice. “Ian? Stop!” she gasped. “Stop.”

A low growl to her left. Nails clicked on the hardwoods. Jackie froze.

“Off, Gus.” His hand flexed. Released.

Her stomach hurt, her shoulder, knee, and elbow throbbed. She fought to catch her breath. Her weapon still rested in the holster under her left arm.

“Who are you?” he demanded in a low voice.

“Jackie . . . Sellers.” She needed a minute. He had a hard punch. Her stomach cramped and nausea swept through her. She thought she could take care of herself just fine, but he had some wicked-good fighting skills.

Silence. “Jackie?”

She heard his shock. “Yes. Can we turn on a light?”

“No.” The sharp whisper stilled her movement toward the light switch.

“Why not?”

“Because they’re watching the house.”

“Who?”

“The people who want to kill me.”

Ian Lockwood rolled to his feet in one smooth move. He pulled Jackie to hers. “Gus, heel.” The dog moved from the shadows and sat at Ian’s left side.

“Who wants to kill you?” she asked.

A sound came from the second floor. They both stilled. “Whoever’s upstairs.” His hand gripped hers and he pulled her toward the kitchen. Gus followed, a silent, obedient shadow.

A dark silhouette at the kitchen door stopped them cold. “Okay, this isn’t good,” he whispered.

“This way.” She gave his fingers a tug and he followed her back into the foyer, then into the den. She went straight to the window next to the fireplace. “Stand on that side of the window.” She pointed and he obeyed her instruction, not quite sure what she had planned, but figuring it was better than what he had.

Which was nothing.

She used one finger to nudge aside the curtain and barely part the blind to enable her to look out of the window. For a good ten seconds, she just stood there, silent, watchful. Ian kept his ear tuned toward the kitchen, expecting to hear the door open at any moment.

The floor creaked again, this time closer to the stairs that

would lead straight down to them. Ian thought his heart might very well explode.

In one smooth move, she moved to the French doors and pushed one open. Cold air rushed in. She motioned to him and he didn't hesitate. He slid through the opening and she followed.

"Gus, come," he whispered. The dog bolted out and took up position next to him.

Jackie shut the door with a quiet click.

He snagged her fingers and started to lead her, then realized he didn't know where he was going. "What are we doing?" he whispered.

"Getting out of here."

"How? My car's in the garage."

She led him across the street and they slipped behind a large oak tree. Gus nudged up against Ian's knee and he rested a hand on the animal's head.

"There," she said, her voice so low he had to lean close to hear it. "See that car down the street about three houses?"

"Yes. The one with the two guys in the front seat?"

"That's my vehicle."

"Uh oh."

"Exactly." She drew in a deep breath. "How many did you count?"

"At least four."

"That's what I got too. I'm hoping they think we're still in the house."

"They might, but it won't be long before they figure out we're not." The dog shifted and Ian whispered a command. Gus went still.

"So, two inside and two working on my car."

"What are you thinking?"

“That I know where to get a vehicle. Then we’re getting out of here and finding a nice safe place to call the cops.”

Ian jerked. “No cops.”

“We’ll talk about it on the way to safety. They’ve left their car running.”

“So you want to take it?”

“We’re going to have to. As soon as they notice us gone, they’ll be canvassing the neighborhood and the streets leading from it. I don’t know what kind of manpower they have.”

“A lot. Trust me on that one. They’ve already tried to kill me once.”

“Then I guess that’s our answer.”

He could feel the tension radiating from her. He placed a hand on her back. Tightly coiled springs rippled under his palm.

“Now,” she whispered.

She darted from behind the tree and jogged to the dark sedan parked in front of his next-door neighbor’s house. She grabbed the driver’s door and flung it open.

A shout reached his ears. They’d been discovered.

Jackie dove into the driver’s seat. “Get in!”

He didn’t need her urging. Gus went first, then Ian threw himself into the passenger seat as the first shot slammed into the door behind him. She had the car in drive before he had the door shut. “If they hit a tire, we’re done for.”

She swerved back and forth as two more bullets hit the vehicle. Gus barked from the backseat. “Down!” Ian ordered. He and the dog dropped.

Then they were around the corner and at the subdivision entrance. Jackie didn’t bother to stop at the sign, she shot out and into the far right lane of the four-lane road.

Ian kept his eyes on the side mirrors. “If they try to follow us, they’ll have to find another vehicle.”

“Or radio for one of their buddies to pick us up.”

“Oh. Right.” He fell silent.

She hooked a left and glanced in the rearview mirror. Seeing nothing so far, she loosened her grip only slightly. “So . . . what have you been up to for the past fifteen years and why is your face splashed all over the news with the words ‘Possible Terrorist’ written beneath it?”