

The Spies That Bind

Book 11 of the NEVER SAY SPY series

By Diane Henders

Published March 2016 by PEBKAC Publishing

* * *

The town of Silverside and all secret technologies are products of my imagination. If I'm abducted by grim-faced men wearing dark glasses, or if I die in an unexplained fiery car crash, you'll know I accidentally came a little too close to the truth.

This is a work of fiction. All of the characters, organizations, and events portrayed in this novel are products of my imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to persons living or dead is entirely coincidental.

Please respect my hard work by complying with copyright laws. This e-book is licensed for your personal enjoyment only. You may not resell this e-book under any circumstances.

Thank you for reading!

Copyright © 2016 Diane Henders

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or in any means—by electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise—without prior written permission.

Books in the NEVER SAY SPY series:

- Book 1: Never Say Spy
- Book 2: The Spy Is Cast
- Book 3: Reach For The Spy
- Book 4: Tell Me No Spies
- Book 5: How Spy I Am
- Book 6: A Spy For A Spy
- Book 7: Spy, Spy Away
- Book 8: Spy Now, Pay Later
- Book 9: Spy High
- Book 10: Spy Away Home
- Book 11: The Spies That Bind

More books coming! For a current list, please visit

www.dianehenders.com

Or sign up for my New Book Notification list at

www.dianehenders.com/books

CHAPTER 1

The monitor on my wrist vibrated for the umpteenth time. Even though I was expecting it, my heart lurched reflexively and my casual glance at the wristband's tiny screen was twitchier than I would have liked.

The image relayed from my surveillance cameras didn't soothe my nerves. Glancing around, I laid a surreptitious hand on the lethal weapon sitting beside me on my back deck.

John Kane, the lethal weapon in question, returned a smile that crinkled the sexy laugh lines around his grey eyes. "Nice party, Aydan," he said. His body heat radiated through my hand.

I hid my momentary breathlessness and squeezed his muscular forearm, wishing I could slide my grip up to that bulging bicep and go for a full-on fondle.

"It's about to get less nice," I warned quietly, and jutted my chin in the direction of the latest arrival.

Kane stiffened. "What the hell is he doing here? You didn't invite him, did you? Or have you temporarily lost your mind?"

I sighed. “No; and no.” I tilted my chair onto its back legs, leaning against the safety of my house while I eyed Tyler Brock’s pierced features and supercilious sneer with distaste. “He’s with Tammy.” I nodded toward the small plump woman who clutched Brock’s arm with one hand and her white cane with the other, her round face beaming eagerly from behind dark glasses. “Spider invited her, but no handlers were available today and Brock is the only other person with a high enough security clearance to accompany her. And you know Spider; he’ll always give people a second chance, even a dickhead like Brock.”

Kane growled softly, a sound that sent shivers racing to parts of my body that had no business shivering in his presence. “Well, if he causes any trouble, I hope you have a good place to hide the body.”

I feigned serious thought. “Could be tricky. If it wasn’t August we could bury him in the garden. A little shitbag like him would do wonders for my vegetables, but I wouldn’t want to disturb them this late in the season. I guess you’ll just have to let him live.”

Kane shook his head in mock chagrin. “The things I do for you.”

Reluctantly removing my hand from his arm, I took a slug of ice-cold beer from the bottle sweating on the small table beside me. “Yeah, I know. I’ll have to find some way to reward you.”

That came out sounding more suggestive than I’d intended, and I cleared my throat and added, “It seems like everybody’s enjoying the party, though. Who’d have thought Spider’s generation would get as much of a kick out of Twister as we did?”

Eyeing the knot of bodies on the grass surrounded by cheering and heckling spectators, Kane chuckled. “Alcohol makes everything

more fun.” He raised his own beer bottle in a toast before taking a swig.

“Except that Spider doesn’t drink,” I pointed out.

Kane’s strong square features softened into an indulgent smile as he gazed across the lawn at Spider’s beanpole figure, Coke in one hand and his other arm around his diminutive fiancée. As we watched, Linda pressed closer to Spider, flashing her sparkling smile up at him. He stooped to kiss her, oblivious to the catcalls that rose from the crowd of young people scattered across my back yard.

I was turning back to Kane when my attention snagged on a middle-aged man who had trailed Brock and Tammy into the yard. The man’s dress shirt and slacks were incongruous among the casually attired party-goers, and my pulse ticked up. Was he an invited guest? Or something more sinister?

That worrisome thought was interrupted by Kane’s chuckle. “I swear Webb looks closer to seventeen than twenty-seven,” he said. “I keep feeling as though I should ask for his ID whenever there’s alcohol around.”

Pulling my mind back to our conversation, I laughed. “Yeah. He’s such a sweet kid.” My smile turned to a grimace, and I slugged some more beer. “Since when did twenty-seven become ‘a kid’ to me? God, I’m old.”

Kane sobered. “Forty-seven is nowhere near old. You’re in better shape than most twenty-year-olds.” The breeze wafted a strand of long hair across my face, and he reached over to tuck it behind my ear with a smile. “See? There’s still more red than grey in your hair.

And you're far more vibrant and desirable than any of these younger women. They're like cardboard cutouts by comparison."

"Thanks." A hot shiver chased down my spine, and I was about to topple into the warm grey of his eyes when good sense reasserted itself. Gulping another largish swallow of beer, I tore my gaze away from him to watch the well-dressed man talking to Brock.

They exchanged a few words, but the man was apparently turned off by Brock's attitude. After a short exchange he turned away, then crossed the yard and greeted Spider's parents with warm handshakes.

I sucked back another swallow of beer. Jeez, woman, take a pill. It's a wedding shower, not an undercover op.

But something about that guy set off my alarm bells...

Across the yard, Linda's Granny Lola caught my eye with a cheery wave before turning to say something to the two gray-haired women with her. They smirked and studied us avidly, and I waved back with a smile and muttered to Kane out of the corner of my mouth.

"I love her to death, but I'll never understand why anybody believes Lola's sweet-little-old-lady act."

Kane grinned across the yard at the tiny wrinkled figure with neon-pink hair, silver-studded black leather bustier, mini-skirt, and biker boots. "She's one of a kind. And you can't deny she's got style."

"No kidding. She should look ridiculous, but that outfit totally suits her."

My wristband buzzed again and I jerked it up to scan the surveillance image before letting out a breath. "Just some of the guests going down to the creek."

Kane nodded, stretching out his legs and reaching for his beer bottle. As he drank, his gaze flicked over the party with the habitual keen evaluation of a top agent, and I let out a small sigh. If he was on the alert, too, was that good or bad?

I hid a grimace behind my beer bottle. It likely just meant we were both paranoid freaks. I glanced over again, but the well-dressed guy was still visiting and looking like he belonged.

Let it go. Nothing to worry about.

Kane said idly, "Hellhound hasn't shown up. Is he coming?"

I snorted. "Are you kidding? Spider asked me to convince him, but as soon as Arnie heard 'wedding shower' he said he was allergic to weddings and started to back away. I tried to explain it was only a big backyard party, but he was already babbling something about having to wash the cat and then he turned and ran."

Kane guffawed. "Wash the *cat*? What kind of lame excuse is that?"

"I'm pretty sure it was just blind panic talking at that point. It was pretty funny to see Mr. Big Tough Biker running scared." I snickered into my beer.

Kane shook his head, still grinning. "He's one of the bravest men I know, but everybody has their limits." He drank some more beer before continuing, "It was good of you to host the party."

"I wanted to." I drew a deep breath, regarding my happy guests and letting the laughter and music wash over me. "I thought..." I swallowed. "I thought it was time to make some good memories on this farm."

His voice softened. “Yes. Long past time, I’d say.” He hesitated. “How are you doing?” He nodded toward my wrist. “You still seem a little jumpy.”

“I’m okay.” I reached for my beer, decided against another swallow, and picked at the label instead. “It’s just that I’m not used to quite so much activity on the monitor.”

“But it’s working well?” Kane inquired, eyeing my wristband with interest.

“Great!” I held out my wrist for inspection. “If there’s movement anywhere on or around my yard it sends a picture to the screen, and I can switch to full-video if I want. It uses a satellite link so I never have to worry about getting out of range, and it doesn’t affect my bug detector. And it’s got a panic button linked to Sirius Dynamics.”

“Good system.” Kane nodded approval before returning his disturbingly observant gaze to my face, his voice gentling. “And does it make you feel safer?”

“Yeah.” The word came out on a sigh, and I added, “I’m a lot better. I haven’t had a flashback for quite a while, and I don’t usually expect bullets flying through my walls anymore. How about you?”

“I’m doing better, too.”

When I looked into his eyes I could see it was true. Instead of the haunted look of four months ago, now the ghosts only lurked at the edges of his clear grey gaze.

I smiled and squeezed his hand. “I’m glad.”

“Me, too. It’s been a difficult time.”

We went back to watching the party in companionable silence. The afternoon heat was diminishing as the sun’s rays lengthened to

evening. Fading traces of barbeque scent mingled with crushed grass, warm hay from the surrounding fields, and the coconut aroma of suntan lotion. The air was soft on my face and arms, and even the holster concealed at my ankle seemed less sweaty and constricting.

Brock and Tammy had concluded their brief conversation with Spider and Linda and now they stood apart from the crowd. Tammy was still chattering at Brock and Brock was still sneering, incongruous in the happy crowd with his multiple piercings, skinny orange jeans, man-purse, and obvious personality defect.

And speaking of incongruous...

The well-dressed man shot a glance my way but didn't approach, joining a different group to shake hands and chat instead.

I should go over and introduce myself. Say hello and find out he was somebody's favourite uncle, and then I could get over my irrational suspicion.

But what if my instincts were right?

My heart thudded a little faster. I didn't even want to think about the potential carnage if he pulled a gun...

My wrist monitor vibrated and I jerked so violently that Kane twitched, too. When I glanced at the display, dread tightened my throat.

"Oh, shit. This doesn't look good." My voice came out tight.

"What?" Kane demanded, his hand hovering near the holster concealed by the loose summer shirt he wore open over his T-shirt.

"Police car coming in my gate." I rose and hurried into the house with Kane on my heels.

Switching to full-video mode, I kept my gaze glued to the tiny screen while I fumbled a secured phone out of my kitchen drawer one-handed and pressed the speed dial button.

“Stemp.” The brusque toneless greeting of the director of clandestine operations made me draw a breath of relief.

“There’s a police car coming up to my house,” I rapped out. “Are they legit?”

“Yes, I sent them. Please cooperate fully.” His emotionless tone somehow managed to become even dryer. “Without revealing anything classified, of course.”

“Right,” I muttered.

“Have Kane call me immediately afterward. Was there anything else?” he asked as the doorbell chimed.

“No,” I growled, and disconnected as I headed for the door. “Stemp sent them,” I said over my shoulder to Kane. “He says to cooperate without revealing anything classified.”

I swung open the inside door and regarded the two uniformed RCMP officers through the screen.

The female officer shuffled her feet, looking uncomfortable. “Hi, um... Aydan Kelly, isn’t it?”

“Yeah. Hi, Officer Peters,” I replied warily, resisting the urge to look away and shuffle my feet, too. Considering that she’d strip-searched me the only other time I’d met her, I wasn’t quite sure of the proper etiquette.

“This is, uh, Officer Glen Birch from the Drumheller detachment,” she went on, and the uniformed man beside her nodded a greeting.

“We’re looking for John Kane. His boss said we would likely find him here.”

Fear constricted my throat. Oh, God. Had something terrible happened to John’s father? Or worse, to Hellhound, for whom John would be listed as next-of-kin?

Oh, God, no. Police only came in person if somebody died...

“C-Come in,” I managed through cold stiff lips, and pushed the screen door open.

CHAPTER 2

“Hi, John,” Officer Birch greeted Kane with a strained smile.

“Glen.” Kane’s face and voice were in cop mode, controlled and expressionless. He nodded to the female officer. “Sandra. What’s this about?”

“Uh...” Clearly uncomfortable, the two officers exchanged a glance before Officer Peters drew a deep breath. “Why don’t you sit down, John?”

“I’ll stand.” Kane straightened into a parade rest that might have looked relaxed if not for the spring-steel tension vibrating in his shoulders. “Spit it out.”

“It’s, uh... it’s about your ex-wife.” Peters squared her shoulders.

Pain flared in Kane’s eyes, crimping his mouth into a hard line. “Alicia’s dead?”

“Uh? Oh, um, no...” Peters drew a deep breath. “When was the last time you saw Alicia? And would you please describe your movements today?”

“I last saw Alicia on Tuesday, June 22, 2004, at approximately four-fifteen in the afternoon at the house where we used to live in Calgary.”

“Wow, that’s really, um... specific... for something that happened seven years ago,” Birch mumbled, staring fixedly at his feet.

Kane gave him a bitter grimace. “That’s when she served me with the divorce papers. And to answer your second question, this morning I woke up at five-thirty as usual and I was at the gym when they opened at six. I worked out for two hours, then went home. I was there until one-thirty this afternoon. I was alone, but if you check my telephone and computer records you’ll see that I was online off and on between eight and eleven AM and at about eleven my dad phoned and we talked until about noon. I was cooking for our potluck dinner between noon and one-thirty but I spent about ten minutes online during that time. Then I drove here for the party, arriving about ten to two. Any of the guests can verify my presence here between then and now. Tell me what happened to Alicia!”

“Oh, good...” Peters pressed her lips together as if she hadn’t meant to reveal her feelings, but both she and Birch looked relieved.

Birch withdrew a photo from his pocket and passed it over to Kane. “Do you know this man?”

Kane studied the photo briefly. “No.” He turned it toward me, displaying an ordinary-looking fortyish man in a camo-printed jacket and matching ball cap. I shook my head.

Kane passed the photo back to Birch and was beginning to speak when Peters interrupted, “Does the name Arbuckle Murphy ring a bell?” She and Birch eyed Kane intently.

“No. Tell me what’s going on.”

“Are you sure?” Birch asked.

Kane frowned. "Of course I'm sure. I wouldn't forget a name like that."

"How about Buck Murphy?" Peters persisted.

"No. Who is he, and how does this relate to Alicia?"

Peters nodded as though he'd confirmed something she already knew. "Thank you, that's all we needed. The questions were really just a formality." She began to turn away.

"Sandra." The name snapped from Kane's lips with such authority that she froze in her tracks. "Glen." Birch stiffened to attention, too, as if unable to defy Kane's command. "Tell me what's happening," Kane rapped out. "Now!"

Peters and Birch exchanged a single defeated glance, and Birch hissed a long breath through his teeth. "I knew you wouldn't let us get away with this," he mumbled. "Look, John, just sit down for a minute, okay?"

"Tell. Me. *Now.*" Kane's growl raised every hair on the back of my neck, and Birch took an involuntary step back.

"Okay... Okay." Birch exchanged another look with Peters and apparently decided to go with the 'ripping-off-the-Bandaid' approach. "Your ex-wife didn't realize she was pregnant when she served you with the divorce papers, and she never told you she'd given birth to your son. Today at about three-thirty PM he was abducted from a birthday party. She didn't want anyone to contact you but the Calgary police convinced her the biological father should be questioned just in case you had somehow discovered the truth and conspired to abduct your child."

The colour drained from Kane's face so fast I thought he might faint. I sprang to his side, gripping his elbow and trying to guide him to a chair, but I might as well have tried to move a mountain. His bloodless lips opened.

"That's not possible," he rasped. "She couldn't have children. The fertility specialist said there was no hope. She must have adopted a child. This is a mistake. A... misunderstanding."

Officer Peters stepped forward to lay a hand on his shoulder. "Without a paternity test we can't know for sure, but I really don't think she's lying, John. I'm sorry, I know this is a shock, but..." She drew a photo out of her pocket and handed it to him. "I doubt if it's a mistake. He looks just like you."

Together, Kane and I stared at the photo. Kane's grey eyes laughed back at us from a chubby childish face under dark hair that matched Kane's own.

"He's six," Officer Peters said softly. "His name is Daniel Wyatt Kane."

The name hit Kane like a gut-punch, half-folding him with a whoosh of air from his whitened lips.

"Sit!" I pushed him into a chair and clamped the back of his neck to press his head down. "Head between your knees. Breathe."

"I'm fine," he muttered, fending me off with an absent-minded sweep of his massive arm that sent me staggering back despite my hundred-and-sixty pounds and five-foot-ten height.

Kane shook his head like a boxer recovering from an uppercut. Then his shoulders squared and he sat up straight. "Give me the facts of the case." His cop face and cop voice were emotionless but the

photo quivered in his white-knuckled grip. “And hurry. The clock’s ticking.”

As if sensing my confusion, he turned to me to explain, “The longer a child is missing, the greater the likelihood that they won’t be found alive. The first forty-eight hours are the critical window.” Returning his hard scrutiny to the two officers, he demanded, “Any ransom demands? Physical evidence? Witnesses?”

“John...” Birch reached over to clasp his shoulder. “I’m sorry, but you’re not on the case. You’re too close to it. Leave it to us.”

Kane rocketed out of the chair, fists clenched. “You’ll damn well tell m...” An instant later he caught himself and drew a deep breath, white lines of strain bracketing his mouth. “Sorry, Glen, Sandra; you’re right. Thank you for telling me this much. Just...”

He drew another deep breath and offered the photo back to them, holding it as if it might break. “...keep me posted.”

“We will. I promise everybody’s doing their absolute best to find him.” Birch nodded at the photo. “Keep it. We made copies.”

“Thank you,” Kane said raggedly.

Birch gave him a tight-lipped smile and Peters gripped his shoulder sympathetically before they let themselves out, leaving us standing in shattering silence.

“How...” Kane shook his head as if still reeling from the blow. He spoke again as if to himself. “How could she...?”

Helpless in the face of his pain, I took his hand and stroked it in silence.

His grip tightened, nearly crushing my fingers. “I have to talk to her,” he muttered.

His hand tightened again and I let out a yelp. “Ease up, Superman!”

The moment the words left my mouth I willed them back with all my might, but the damage was done. His face twisted with pain, and I knew he was remembering the little boy who had gazed up with hero-worship shining in his eyes and called him Soopooman only a few months ago. Younger than his own son.

The son he’d lost without ever knowing of his existence.

Desperate to distract him, I pulled free of his grip and hurried over to extract another secured phone from the kitchen drawer.

“Call Stemp.” I pushed the phone into his hand. “He said he wanted to talk to you right away.”

“Stemp.” Kane blinked at me like a sleepwalker mired in a waking nightmare. “What does he want?”

“I don’t know, just phone him, okay? Here.” I pressed the speed dial button and lifted his hand to his ear, phone and all.

He frowned at the crackle on the other end that was undoubtedly Stemp’s curt greeting. Then he lowered the phone and I thought for a moment he was going to drop it and walk away, but he pressed the speaker button instead.

“It’s Kane,” he said flatly, and waited.

“You’ve spoken to the RCMP?” Stemp inquired.

“Yes.”

“My sympathies. This must be very difficult for you.”

A hint of surprise touched Kane’s shell-shocked expression, but he didn’t know about Stemp’s secret daughter overseas. I alone understood how heartfelt Stemp’s words truly were.

“Thank you,” Kane mumbled.

“That said...” Stemp’s voice regained its usual dispassionate crispness. “You are to have no professional involvement in this case whatsoever. That’s a direct order. You’re too close to it, and in any case it’s outside the Department’s mandate. Any interference with the official investigation will be grounds for disciplinary action, dishonourable discharge, and/or imprisonment. Is that clear?”

“Yes. That won’t be a problem,” Kane said with no inflection whatsoever. “Because I quit. Effective now. I’ll drop off my written resignation when I have time.”

“John!” I hissed. “Think about this! You can’t just-”

“I just did.”

As Kane moved to press the disconnect button, Stemp spoke again. “Your resignation is accepted. Surrender your weapon and report to Sirius Dynamics for debriefing immediately.”

The robotic voice fell again from Kane’s lips. “I’m giving my weapon to Aydan right now. She can turn it in. I’ll come in later for my debriefing.”

“Come in immedi-”

Before Stemp could finish the sentence Kane clicked off the phone. He was reaching for his holster when a commotion at the back door halted him.

“...F-fine,” a too-loud voice insisted. “I’m f-” A hiccup interrupted the word before he finished, “Fine! Jus’... Jus’ leemee ‘lone...”

“Aydan!” Linda’s call sounded strained. “Where are you?”

“Here!”

I hurried toward the voices, rounding the corner in time to see Spider stagger and carom off the wall next to the back door. His eyes were unfocused in his unnaturally flushed face and angry red blotches blazed on the pale skin of his throat. Linda braced her tiny frame against him in a futile attempt to stabilize him. On his other side, a slim baby-faced young man clung to Spider's arm, his forehead crinkled with worry.

"Aydan, I'm sorry, we'll have to go now. Thank you so much for hosting our wedding shower." Linda gave me a tight smile that was equal parts worry and anger. "Someone spiked Spider's drink, and he's allergic to alcohol."

"I'm sure it was that Tyler guy who came with his blind mother." The slim young man shot a venomous glance over his shoulder through the still-open door. "He's a total jerk, and I saw him with a hip flask."

"She's not his mother," Linda began, but I interrupted, studying Spider worriedly.

"Should I call an ambulance?"

"I think... umph." Linda nearly buckled as Spider staggered again, bracing himself on her shoulder with a heavy hand. "I think he'll be okay," she continued after righting them both. "I've already given him an antihistamine and if he was going to have an anaphylactic reaction he likely would have already, but the drug is intensifying the effect of the alcohol..."

"I'm really, reeeelly..." Noisy hiccup. "...drunk," Spider informed us with a lopsided grin. "But don' worry, Schw... Shweetie..." He attempted an inaccurate kiss and succeeded in thumping his forehead

hard enough against Linda's to make them both stagger. "I'll be... f... f..." His eyelids drooped and he blinked heavily once. "...fine..."

The word faded as his eyes dropped shut and his knees buckled. Kane sprang from behind me to seize Spider's shoulders and lower him gently to the floor.

"Ohmigod!" The baby-faced young man fell to his knees beside them, patting Spider's face with shaking hands. "Spider! Spider! Ohmigod, say something!"

"Give him air," Kane said, and gently but firmly pushed the young man back.

Linda was already kneeling beside Spider, fingers on his pulse. He mumbled something unintelligible, still smiling, but his eyes didn't reopen.

"Calm down, Tim," Linda said. "I don't think he's in any danger. But I'm going to take him to the hospital just in case."

"Call an ambulance," I urged. "Don't take a chance on driving. If he gets worse..."

I trailed off, unable to even speak the words.

"I'll get our friends to drive so I can ride with him in the back. Tim, go and get Grant and Red." She turned back to me while Tim continued to wring his hands helplessly over Spider. "If there's any problem, I can call the ambulance from the car, and it'll be faster if we meet them on the way to town anyway." She frowned. "Tim! Go!"

He stared at her with his lips trembling, clearly beyond the point of any useful action, and she took him by the arm. "Aydan, John, please stay with Spider while I make the arrangements."

I nodded and she vanished out the door, a tiny but authoritative figure dragging the ineffectual Tim. In moments she returned with two burly young men and Lola, her wrinkled face uncharacteristically serious.

The two young men loaded Spider's pliant body into the car with a matter-of-fact mien that bespoke frequent experience with semi-conscious drunks, and minutes later they were gone.

Lola patted my arm. "Don't look so worried, honey," she comforted. "He's just a bit drunk. He'll be okay. Remember, Linda's a good nurse."

"I know..."

I spared a moment of guilt over the fact that I was less worried about Spider than I was about Kane. His face was expressionless, but his hands were clenched in white-knuckled fists and the ghosts haunted his eyes again.

No, not ghosts.

Demons.

The savage flames of his own personal hell flickered in his eyes, replaying his torturous march four months ago carrying a horribly abused child.

I shuddered and turned back to Lola. "Can you do me a huge favour?"

"Of course, honey. Name it."

Kane was heading for the door, looking ready to tear someone apart with his bare hands. I had no idea where he might be going, but it seemed like an exceptionally bad idea to let him go alone.

“Um, John’s got a family emergency and we need to go.” I snatched up my waist pouch from beside the door and grabbed a spare key out of my kitchen drawer to hand to Lola. “Could you please host the party until everybody’s ready to leave and then lock up? Just snap the gate padlock shut on your way out and spin the combination.”

“No problem.” Her bigger-than-life voice was filled with reassurance. “Don’t worry about a thing. I’ll handle it.”

The door closed behind Kane, and Lola pulled me down to her level to murmur, “How bad is it?”

I gulped, fighting the tightness in my throat, but all I could manage was a dry whisper.

“It’s bad. It’s really bad.”

CHAPTER 3

Dashing out my front door, I caught up to Kane just as he was opening the driver's door of his black Expedition.

"Wait," I panted. "Where are you going?"

"Calgary." He swung into the driver's seat.

"Whoa, hang on!" I wedged myself into the opening before he could swing the door shut. "Are you okay to drive?"

"I've only had two beers over the last couple of hours. I'm not impaired."

I hadn't been referring to his blood-alcohol levels, but he looked ready to peel out of there with me clinging to his door handle so I didn't press the point.

"Okay." I eyed him worriedly. "I'm coming along. If I go around to the passenger's side, will you promise to let me in? Or do I need to crawl over top of you from here?"

The grim lines eased a fraction from his face and he pressed the lock release. "Go around. I promise to let you in."

"Thanks." I circled around the front of the vehicle just in case, but I made it into the passenger's seat without incident and he even waited for me to do up my seatbelt before stepping on the gas.

When we reached the highway a few minutes later, he accelerated to just over the speed limit before activating the cruise control. He usually drove without it, but I guessed he didn't trust himself today. His knuckles glowed white on the steering wheel.

I reached over to brush my fingertips lightly over the back of his hand. "Try to relax a bit. If you do that for the next two hours you won't be able to feel your hands by the time we get there."

He grunted assent and loosened his grip, then added, "Would you please call Hellhound? Put him on speaker."

I extracted my cell phone from my waist pouch and dialed, and a few moments later Hellhound's cheerful rasp filled the cab. "Hey, Aydan, how ya doin'? How's the party?"

"Hi, Arnie." I glanced at Kane's rigid face and decided not to waste time on pleasantries. "I'm fine, but we have a situation. John and I are on our way to Calgary. I've got you on speaker so we can all talk."

"Shit, what's wrong?"

The muscles in Kane's jaw rippled as though he was working to control his voice. "Do you know where Alicia is living now?"

A short pause. "Nah," Hellhound said cautiously. "Why?"

"Can you find out?"

"Well, sure, it ain't rocket science. But why d'ya wanna know? Thought ya didn't wanna have anythin' to do with her."

"Get me her address and phone number. I'll pay your usual P.I. rates."

"The hell ya will," Hellhound growled. "Ya don't hafta fuckin' pay me. But, Cap..." He hesitated. "Sorry, I gotta know what's goin' on."

“I just found out she was pregnant when she divorced me.” Kane’s voice was tight with pain or anger, or probably both. “I have a six-year-old son. He was abducted today. I wouldn’t have known at all, except that the RCMP just finished questioning me.”

“What the everlovin’ *fuck*?” Hellhound demanded, his gravelly voice rising to an incredulous shout.

“I have to talk to her,” Kane ground out. “I have to see her. Find out... The fertility specialist said it was impossible. But...” His fists were clenched on the wheel again. “The police showed me a photo. He looks just like me. And she named him Daniel Wyatt...” His voice choked off and he swallowed audibly.

“Fuck,” Hellhound repeated.

“She must be lying.” Kane swallowed again. “Or the police got it wrong. It just can’t be. The specialist said it couldn’t happen.”

My heart clutched. I knew he wasn’t denying it because he didn’t want a child. He just didn’t dare to hope.

Hellhound hesitated. “I dunno about that, Cap. Remember when we were sittin’ in the bar after her last appointment? Ya said to me, ‘The specialist said it would be practically impossible for Alicia to get pregnant. He suggested we consider adoption. It’s over, Arnie; that was our last hope’. But it was you that said ‘no hope’, not the doc. ‘Practically impossible’ ain’t the same thing.”

Kane’s lips twisted in a parody of a smile. “You and your photographic memory. If you say that’s what I said, I believe you. So maybe I really do have a son.” His jaw muscles rippled. “If he hasn’t already been killed by the scumbag who abducted him. Find Alicia.

Call me as soon as you have anything. If we get to Calgary before we hear from you, we'll come to your place."

"I'm on it." Hellhound's rasp softened. "Hang in there, Cap. Think good thoughts."

He disconnected, and I stowed my phone again before reaching over to massage Kane's neck. His muscles felt like iron under my touch.

"Try to relax a bit," I urged. "Tensing up like this won't help anyone, least of all you."

Kane hissed out a breath between his teeth. "I know." He shook his head as if trying to rid himself of dark thoughts. "I know better. I've been in situations like this before. I should be able to..."

He trailed off, and I said softly, "Maybe not exactly like this."

He blew out another breath. "Not exactly."

I kept rubbing in silence and after a while his muscles softened, probably due more to his own efforts to relax than to my ineffectual one-handed massage.

"Do you want to talk about it?" I inquired after a half-hour of silent driving. "It sounded as though his name is significant to you. Is he named after your brother?"

Kane spared me a glance before returning his attention to the highway. "Yes."

I thought he was going to fall silent again, but he added, "We were just starting to talk about having a family when Daniel was killed. We agreed that if our first baby was a boy, we'd name him Daniel."

"And Wyatt is your middle name, isn't it?" I prompted.

"Yes."

Silence fell again.

After several miles Kane spoke as though our conversation had never lapsed. “So either she was honouring my wishes... or she was deliberately taunting me.”

“She couldn’t have been trying to hurt you.” I sent up a silent prayer that it would be true. “If she wanted to taunt you she would have told you about him.”

“Maybe.”

“Was she, um...” I wasn’t quite sure how to phrase the question. “Was your split, um... amicable? I mean, I know it’s never easy, but...”

“Did she hate me that much?” Kane stared bleakly out the windshield. “I didn’t think so, but obviously I was wrong.” He barked out a mirthless laugh. “I guess my first hint should have been the way she slapped me with the divorce papers.”

“Well, yeah, divorce papers are usually a bad sign...”

“No, I meant her timing.” He stared straight ahead, his jaw working for a moment before he spoke again. “Maybe you thought it was odd that I remember the exact date and time.”

“Um, well... I guess that kind of thing is... um... memorable...” I fumbled, trying for tact.

“You could say so,” he said bitterly. “Do you remember the armed standoff in 2004 where ten hostages were killed? It started on June twentieth.”

I nodded, my heart sinking with recognition. “I remember, but I’d forgotten the exact date.”

“I was with the Emergency Response unit at the time,” he went on. “A gunman held fifteen people hostage in a bank. We tried to negotiate...”

“...but he wasn’t interested in negotiating, was he?” I finished. “He just wanted the media attention.”

“Yes. He played us like a cat with mice.” Kane spat the words with disgust. “He killed a hostage every four hours. Each time he made a demand before the killing, but it didn’t matter whether we complied with his demands or not. Six innocent people and the police negotiator were dead before we realized he was going to kill all the hostages anyway. So we had to take a chance on collateral damage when we stormed the building.”

I squeezed my eyes shut. “I remember. That was a horrible no-win situation. He murdered four more and wounded the rest before the team killed him.”

“Yes.” Kane stared into the past, his shoulders bunched, hands clenched on the wheel.

When he didn’t go on, I murmured, “So it was a bad time to get hit with divorce papers.”

His face twisted. “We had been arguing when my pager went off. When I started with the RCMP I was assigned to remote areas. Alicia hated small-town living, so after a few years I transferred to the Emergency Response Team based in Calgary. But I had only been with the ERT six months and she was already nagging me to quit. I was angry because she was the reason I’d transferred in the first place, but she said she spent all her time worrying that I’d be killed and

accused me of never being there for her. But when the pager went off, I had to go.”

He swallowed. “I was gone for forty-eight hours. No sleep. Running on pure adrenaline. Finally I got home. The blood of innocents on my clothes. On my conscience. Staggered up the front steps and she met me at the door. She’d packed my clothes into suitcases. She slapped the papers against my chest and said, ‘You’re never here anyway. Don’t be here when I get back.’ Then she turned and walked away. Got in her car and drove away. That was the last time I saw her.”

He let out a breath. “Four-fifteen on June twenty-second. Two hours after the last bullet was fired, my marriage died.”

My throat closed. “I’m so sorry,” I whispered.

Kane twitched his shoulders. “We had been having problems for quite a while. It was bad timing, that’s all.” We rode in silence for a few more moments before he spoke again. “Aydan... thank you.” His hand slid over to clasp mine. “It means a lot to have you in my corner at a time like this.”

I squeezed his hand. “What are friends for?”

My phone rang, and I snatched it out of my waist pouch and glanced at the call display before punching the Talk button and activating the speaker. “Hi, Arnie, that was quick. I’ve got you on speaker again.”

“Thanks, darlin’,” he began, but Kane interrupted.

“Did you find her?”

“Hell, yeah. Easy. She’s still livin’ at your old place. Same phone number, too.”

Kane let out a breath. "Good. Thank you."

"No problem. How 'bout if I head over there an' see if she's home-"

"No," Kane interrupted. "I don't want her to know I'm coming."

"I could put on my Al Hamlin disguise," Hellhound suggested. "Cruise past, make sure she's there, maybe set up a little surveillance-"

"No," Kane repeated. "The police will be there and I don't want to take a chance. I'll call you when we're at the edge of town and you can meet us over there." He hesitated. "...if you have time...?"

"Fuck, Cap, ya don't hafta ask. Anythin' ya need, I'm there."

When the outskirts of Calgary came into view after another hour of silent driving, Kane spoke at last.

"Would you please call Hellhound again? Tell him we'll meet him a block west of the house in forty-five minutes."

"Sure." I pulled out my phone and dialled.

The conversation was short, and after making the arrangements I disconnected and tucked my phone away again. Casting a sidelong glance at Kane's rigid form in the driver's seat, I cleared my throat and tried for a neutral tone.

"So, um... what do you plan to do when you get there?"

"I don't know." His jaw muscles bulged and his next words ground out between his teeth. "I don't know what to do. I don't know what to say to her. I can't..." He broke off with a hissing exhalation. "What the hell's wrong with me, Aydan? I'm an experienced agent. I should be able to handle this."

Sympathy constricted my throat. “It’s nothing to do with your competence as an agent. You’re a dad who’s just found out his child is missing. There’s no way to turn that off.”

“A dad,” he repeated bitterly. “I’m not a dad. I’m just a sperm donor.”

“John...”

“It doesn’t matter,” he interrupted. “I have to let that go and stay focused.” He shot me a single tortured glance before returning his gaze to the road. “My son’s... Daniel’s life might depend on it.”

“No, you don’t have to.” When he shook his head and clenched his jaw, I reached over to grip his forearm and spoke more forcefully. “John, listen to me. This is not your case. The RCMP warned you off. Stemp warned you off. They’re right; you’re too close to it. And you weren’t even back to active duty yet so you shouldn’t be involved regardless. Talk to Alicia if you need to, but stay out of the investigation.”

“Don’t tell me that,” he said flatly. “If it was your child...”

I sighed. “Yeah, I know, I’d be in there like a dirty shirt. But you’re a professional. You know better.”

“So do you.” Kane’s lips twisted in a humourless smile. “And it wouldn’t stop you for an instant.”

“But...”

I racked my brain for some useful rebuttal and came up empty. I couldn’t preach from any moral high ground. He knew me too well.

We drove the remainder of the trip in silence while the fading sunset drained the western sky to black.

CHAPTER 4

When Kane pulled to a stop in a quiet residential area, Hellhound straightened from his slouch against his Harley Fatboy, leaving his leather jacket and helmet lying on its seat. He strode over to meet us as we got out of the Expedition, the harsh streetlights transforming his battle-scarred features into a forbidding mask of beard and shadowed eye sockets atop a mountain of tattooed muscle.

“What’s the plan, Cap?” he rasped.

Kane hissed out a short breath between his teeth, flexing his hands as though trying to regain his circulation. “Let’s go and find out.”

Hellhound gave me a worried glance as we trailed behind Kane’s long strides, and I returned a helpless shrug.

At the front door, Kane pressed the doorbell without hesitation and we waited.

After several moments that seemed longer than they probably were, the door opened and a man surveyed us expressionlessly. Despite his civilian clothes, his short-cropped hair and level gaze said ‘cop’ just as clearly as the badge clipped to his belt.

“Yes?” he prompted.

Kane squared off into parade rest. “We’re here to see Alicia.”

The cop surveyed him with a frown, obviously picking up the 'cop' vibe from Kane in turn. "In what capacity?"

Kane drew a deep breath. "I'm John Kane. Daniel's biological father."

Sympathy transformed the other man's face. "I'm Carson Mayweather with the Calgary City Police. I'm handling your son's case. Please come in."

He stood back from the doorway and we filed in.

As we rounded the corner, a soft-looking brunette sprang up from the sofa and hurled herself at Kane with a choked cry. I glimpsed brown eyes in white strained features before she flung her arms around Kane and buried her face in his chest.

His arms closed around her automatically, but his eyes blazed grey fire in an expressionless face.

"Oh, John, thank God you're here," she babbled, her voice muffled by his shirt. "You have to help me, you have to get him back!"

Kane's gaze sought Officer Mayweather over her head. "Are there any new developments?" Kane asked. "Any ransom demands?"

Mayweather shook his head regretfully. "Nothing new."

"Alicia." Kane gently disengaged from her grip and stepped back. "Tell me what happened."

"He was at a birthday party. His... his best friend Sammy, just a few blocks away..." She dashed tears from her eyes with trembling hands, gazing up at Kane imploringly. "They said Buck... my ex-boyfriend... p-picked him up..." Her voice broke.

Officer Mayweather touched her elbow. "Why don't you sit down?"

She sniffled and turned away to pull a tissue out of the well-used box beside the sofa before perching on the edge of the cushions. Earlier today she might have been pretty, but terror had etched deep lines around her eyes and mouth, and her eyes were red-rimmed above blotchy cheeks.

A toy soldier lay half-concealed under the couch, and I sensed Kane's pain as he glanced at it and then looked away, his lips tightening.

As if coming back to the present, Alicia glanced at Arnie and me for the first time.

"Hey, Lish," Arnie rasped gently. "How ya holdin' up?"

"Don't call me that!" Red spots flared into her cheeks. "I hate it, I've *always* hated it!"

Hellhound blinked as though she'd slapped him. "Shit, Li... sorry, uh... Alicia, I wouldn't'a called ya that if I knew. Why didn't ya ever say anythin'?"

"It doesn't matter." She shredded the tissue without looking at it, her bloodshot gaze trained on the wall behind us. "It doesn't matter; nothing matters except Daniel. I'm..." She shook herself and focused on us again. "Please sit down."

We settled ourselves, Hellhound in the chair and Kane and I on the loveseat, and Alicia gave me a chilly once-over before turning to Kane. "I suppose this is your girlfriend."

"John and I work together," I said hurriedly. "Sorry I didn't introduce myself. I'm Aydan Kelly."

"Oh." Her expression softened into relief. "So you're a cop, too."

“Um, no...” I began, but Mayweather interrupted, giving Kane a keen glance.

“Peters and Birch said you’d probably show up here. You know each other pretty well?”

“Not really, we just work together sometimes,” Kane said without inflection. “They’re good officers.”

“So you didn’t know you had a son at all.” Mayweather eyed him with the intensity I recognized from all the cops and agents I knew. Watching for lies.

“No. Not until they questioned me a couple of hours ago.” Kane turned a burning look on Alicia.

“Don’t you put this on me,” she said defensively. “I told them not to contact you. I told them you didn’t have anything to do with it.”

“But I do,” Kane said in a voice so soft it sent a shiver of primal fear down my spine. “He’s my son, too. And you kept him from me.”

The red spots were burning in Alicia’s cheeks again. “No, *you* did that. You were never here while we were married, and then you left and never came back. It’s your own fault that you never knew Daniel existed.”

“You told me to leave and never come back!” Kane snapped. “What did you expect me to do?”

Alicia lunged to her feet. “I expected you to fight for me... for *us!* You’re such a big hero, always ready to fight for everybody else, even total strangers in some horrid war on the other side of the world, but you wouldn’t fight for *us!*”

Kane was on his feet, too. “You packed my bags! You had the divorce papers ready! I don’t know what delusional world you live in,

but life isn't like those romance novels you love so much! In real life a guy who refuses to leave and tries to force a reconciliation gets slapped with a restraining order and labelled a stalker!"

"*You didn't even try!*" Alicia was screaming up into Kane's face, and Mayweather intervened with a hand on her elbow.

"Let's cool it, folks," he said in the same 'everybody-stay-calm' cop voice that Kane so frequently used. "Alicia, John, let's just sit down. This isn't helping Daniel."

Alicia let him guide her back to the sofa while Kane sank onto the edge of the loveseat again, but he leaned forward, his gaze boring holes in Alicia.

"What did you tell him?" he asked in that deadly-quiet tone. "Did you tell him your boyfriend was his father?"

"No." She stared through him, cold and remote. "I told him that his father was John Wyatt Kane, a man I once loved very much. A brave soldier who died fighting in a war, in a place far away over the ocean."

"You told him I was *dead?*" Kane's fists knotted. "*You lied to him?*"

"It wasn't a lie." Alicia dropped her gaze to watch her hands throttling each other in her lap. "John Wyatt Kane died in that war," she whispered. "The man I loved never came back."

Kane went grey-white as though he'd been stabbed in the gut. My hand flew to his without a conscious decision on my part, earning a dirty look from Alicia.

“I’m sorry,” Kane said hoarsely. “I tried. You have to know how hard I tried...” He swallowed. “But you should have told me you were pregnant. I would have-”

“Would have *what?*” Alicia demanded, her fists clenching. “Tried harder? I wasn’t good enough when I was barren, but if I could give you a son maybe I was worth a little more effort? Is that it?” Her voice was rising again, her knuckles whitening. “Was I just a... a... *brood mare* to you?”

“No, of course not, I-”

“Folks,” Officer Mayweather interrupted. “We’re not accomplishing anything here. John, was there something specific you wanted?”

Kane squared his shoulders. “Yes. I’d like to know exactly what happened, please. And what’s been done so far.”

“Alicia, will you please tell it again?” Mayweather inquired. “I realize it’s upsetting, but each time you tell it there’s a chance that you might remember something more.”

She nodded, her arms wrapped tightly around her body while she stared at the floor. “Daniel went to Sammy’s party. He was so excited. It was all he’d talked about for weeks. Sammy is his best friend and they share a passion for toy soldiers.” She shuddered. “They pretend they’re soldiers fighting in a war. I should never have told him John was in the military.”

“Please go on, Alicia,” Mayweather encouraged.

“Yes. Well.” She drew a deep breath, still hugging herself. “Anyway, the party was at two o’clock, and Marta...” She glanced briefly at Kane before returning her gaze to the carpet. “Marta is

Sammy's mother. Marta said she'd walk Daniel home after the party ended at four o'clock. At four-thirty I started to wonder. At five o'clock I called her, and she said..." Her voice wavered. "She said... my ex had picked him up at three-thirty."

"Was she certain it was Murphy?" Kane snapped. "How well did she know him?"

"Yes. She knew him, and she didn't think anything was wrong. Arbuckle told her..." She trailed off at Hellhound's snicker and added, "Yes, his name is Arbuckle. Arbuckle Faulkner Murphy. His parents had great aspirations for their children. His brother's name is Penobscot Salinger Murphy. No wonder they go by Buck and Scot."

Hellhound stifled himself, scrubbing a hand over his beard as Alicia went on, "Anyway, Buck told her I'd asked him to pick Daniel up from the birthday party so they could go camping. Marta was pleased that he was making the effort because Buck was often critical of Daniel. He called him a girly-boy." She glanced at Kane's thundercloud scowl and hastened to explain, "That's why we split up."

"Don't see what's girly about playin' with toy soldiers," Hellhound observed.

"No, Buck approved of that because it was manly. But Daniel liked..." Her voice caught on a sob, but she stiffened her spine and went on firmly, "...he *likes* to draw and paint. And he likes to help me bake cookies." She shot a defensive look at Kane. "I encourage him in whatever he enjoys. He's not..." She made angry air quotes. "...'girly' or 'manly'. He's just a happy child who loves soldiers and art and bugs and mud and puppies and kittens and baking and books... and... h-hockey..." Her words trailed off into a quaver.

“You’re a good mother,” Kane said gently. “I always knew you would be.”

Tears welled up in her eyes. “And now he’s gone...”

“We’ll find him. Just focus,” Kane encouraged, his cop voice strong and calm despite the tension vibrating in his shoulders. “So Murphy abducted Daniel as... what? Leverage? Revenge? What did you do when you discovered he’d taken Daniel?”

“I don’t know why he’d take Daniel, he just wasn’t that interested in children...” Alicia gulped. “Maybe... maybe this is all a big mistake and everything’s fine and they’re on their way home...” She threw an imploring look toward Mayweather, but I could tell she didn’t believe her own words any more than he did. “Anyway,” she went on shakily, “I... I wasn’t too worried... at first. Angry, but not worried. Buck had asked earlier to take Daniel camping this weekend, and although Daniel was excited about the idea, I had said no.”

Kane’s voice came out bleak as bone. “Why? Did you have reason to believe Murphy couldn’t be trusted alone with Daniel?”

“No!” Alicia straightened, meeting Kane’s eyes directly for the first time. “No, he would never molest a child. I...” She dropped her gaze again. “I actually hired a private investigator to check on him when we first started going out. He wasn’t a pedophile.”

She swallowed. “It was just that... I wasn’t sure it was good for Daniel to continue seeing Buck when there was no chance we’d reconcile...” Alicia gulped back tears. “I c-called Buck’s cell phone but it went to voicemail. I thought he was probably just ignoring me until they’d set up camp so I wouldn’t have the heart to make him bring Daniel back. And...” She wiped her eyes with the crumpled tissue.

"If... If he had called... I'm not sure I w-would have. Daniel was so... thrilled at the thought of camping, and he needs male influences..."

As if realizing she was twisting the knife, she gave Kane a guilty glance before continuing hurriedly, "But when he hadn't called by six, I started to worry in earnest. I called the police..." She threw an imploring look at Mayweather. "I'd been calling and calling Buck's cell phone b-but... I should have called the police right away, I should have..." She trailed off helplessly.

"If Murphy was contemptuous of Daniel and didn't like children, why the sudden interest in camping?" Kane asked. "Had Murphy been acting unusual lately? Any changes in routine? Changes in the way he interacted with Daniel? Did Daniel say anything about him or act differently around him? Had anything changed recently in your relationship with him?" He broke off with an apologetic look at Mayweather. "Sorry, I'm sure you've already gone over this."

Mayweather nodded. "It's okay. It's worth going over again. We never know when we might uncover some new detail."

"Thank you," Kane said. "Alicia? Anything?"

She let her hand fall open limply in her lap. "No. Nothing had changed. I wasn't surprised by the camping trip because after we broke up it wasn't unusual for Buck to drop by on a whim and take Daniel out for a few hours." She wrinkled her nose. "He criticized the way I'm bringing Daniel up, and said he had to teach Daniel to be a man. But I think he just took Daniel to the park and tried to attract women by playing the doting dad. Poor Daniel lapped up the attention; he wanted a father so much..."

Kane made a small sound as if in pain, but if I hadn't known him so well I would have thought he was only clearing his throat. His impassive expression never wavered.

"Fuckin' sick!" Hellhound burst out. "What kinda sick fuckin' asshole uses a kid like that?"

Alicia hunched her shoulders, still staring at the floor. "Anyway, he 'borrowed' Daniel last weekend, so that's likely how he knew about the party at Sammy's house. But..." She jerked forward, reddened eyes burning in her white face. "Don't you see, it doesn't *matter* how he knew! It's too late for that! What if... oh, God, what if I was wrong about Buck? What if he sold Daniel to some horrible child prostitution ring?"

* * *

For purchasing information for The Spies That Bind, please visit
www.dianehenders.com/books

Thanks for reading! I hope you'll come by and visit me at
www.dianehenders.com. I write something new there every
week, and I love chatting with visitors.

Or visit my Facebook page at
www.facebook.com/authordianehenders to keep up with all the
latest news. Looking forward to seeing you!