

Witness Undercover (Love Inspired Suspense)

By Debra Cowan

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IN SAFE KEEPING

Laura Prentiss will do whatever it takes to save her father—even come out of witness protection. Ever since turning in evidence that put her dangerous ex behind bars, she's had a killer on her trail. It'll take someone extraordinary to keep her safe now—someone like former navy SEAL Griffin Devaney. Griffin blames himself for the ambush that took his teammates' lives, and he's determined that nothing will ever happen to someone under his protection again. But as the connection between Griffin and Laura grows, so do the threats against them. Griffin will put everything at stake for a future with Laura—if they survive long enough to have one.

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Witness Undercover (Love Inspired Suspense) By Debra Cowan Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #448009 in eBooks
- Published on: 2015-05-01
- Released on: 2015-05-01
- Format: Kindle eBook

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Editorial Review

About the Author
Like many writers, Debra Cowan made up stories in her head as a child. Her BA in English was obtained with the intention of following family tradition and becoming a school teacher, but after she wrote her first novel, there was no looking back. In 1993, she sold her first manuscript and now writes both historical and contemporary romantic suspense for Harlequin/Silhouette. Debra loves to hear from readers. She can be reached through her website at: www.debracowan.net

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Laura Prentiss hadn't wanted a new beginning, a new name, but that was what she'd gotten. After the mess she'd made of her life, she was lucky to be alive.

Thanks to witness protection, she was now Laura Parker, assistant manager of Miss Behavin', a ladies' boutique in Pueblo, Colorado, that was currently closed for the night.

Thanksgiving was only weeks away. This would be her first here in Pueblo, her first without family. Laura tried not to feel sorry for herself.

She had a job and friends, even if they didn't know her real name. Jesus had left behind his family without complaining. She would be fine.

Just as she opened a case of potpourri to stock, she heard a knock on the back door.

Laura froze, her hands going clammy. It couldn't be a delivery, as it was after business hours. She reached for the bat in the corner kept for protection.

After her months in WitSec, had Vin Arrico finally found her?

The thought that her past might have caught up to her had Laura's stomach knotting. She crept to the door at the back of the storage room.

The knock sounded again, making her jump. "Laura? Miss Parker?"

She recognized the thick Texas accent. "Marshal Yates?"

"Yes. I need to see you."

If the US marshal who had handled her case from the beginning had driven down from the field office in Colorado Springs, something was wrong. Very wrong.

Setting the bat aside, she unlocked the steel door and stepped back as the tall lanky man entered. He was followed by one of the biggest men Laura had ever seen. The stranger closed the door behind him, looking around at the shelves of candles, women's shoes and boxes of unpacked jewelry before shifting his attention to her.

Her shoulders tensed. In the light of the single-bulb fixture, she couldn't tell the color of his eyes, but they

were piercing and glittered like steel. A strange sensation fluttered in her stomach. She turned to Floyd Yates.

"Has something happened with Vin?"

Laura had no doubt her ex-boyfriend could find her even from prison.

"No, nothing like that," Floyd said. "Sorry to alarm you."

He gestured to the man beside him. "Laura, this is Griffin Devaney."

She nodded at the stranger with neatly trimmed dark hair and whisker stubble. His six-foot-four frame filled the space. He studied her with a quiet certainty that made it difficult to breathe. Who was he? Why had Floyd brought him?

The open space seemed small and cramped with Griffin Devaney there. His well-fitting denim jacket was faded to a soft blue, as were his jeans.

The marshal turned to her. "Devaney works with your aunt at Enigma, Inc."

Laura started. Her aunt, Joy Langston, had worked at that company for years. Laura had never known how to label the enterprise. Private security? Personal security? Search and rescue?

Yates continued. "She sent Devaney for you and he contacted me."

Even though Laura knew she shouldn't have done so, she had told her aunt about WitSec the night she'd left Oklahoma City.

Joy knew Laura's situation, knew the danger posed by exposing her. So why had Floyd brought Devaney here?

Palms clammy, she clasped her hands together, her attention locked on the man who had protected her for the past ten months. "Just tell me."

"Your father has cancer," Floyd said. "A relapse of non-Hodgkin's lymphoma."

Relapse? Panic punched her in the chest followed quickly by resentment and regret. Her mother had died from cancer. Was her father close to death? Did he want to see her?

"He was first diagnosed nine months ago. He was cautioned that if the cancer returned, he would need a bone marrow transplant."

Devaney spoke up. "A lot of people have been tested, but you're the only match."

She frowned. "How do you know that?"

"You had a blood sample in the donor registry."

Before going into hiding, Laura had regularly donated blood and made sure to put herself on the register for

both blood and bone marrow donors. She turned to Floyd. "You said my dad had relapsed."

"Yes. Two weeks ago, during his monthly check up, he learned the cancer was back."

Two bouts of cancer. A bone marrow transplant. Her guilt over their years-long estrangement pinched at her. Laura was the last person on earth her father would want to help him, but Floyd and Devaney didn't need to know that.

She glanced at the marshal. "Have you known about this since Dad's first diagnosis?"

"No." He hooked a thumb at the big man beside him. "Not until Devaney told me tonight."

Even if Floyd had known, it would've done no good to tell Laura. She wouldn't have been able to help her dad and her dad hadn't needed her then. But he did now.

"What about Vin?"

"My boss called to tell me that Devaney was coming. He's convinced this man can keep you safe. Devaney made a compelling case himself. He'll be with you 24/7 and he has backup if he needs it."

She could read nothing in the younger man's rugged features, the tight mouth or eyes that she could now see were a perfect mix of blue and green. There was a stillness about him yet also a hum of coiled energy beneath the surface, as if he could explode into motion faster than she could blink.

She drew in a deep breath. The everyday scents of perfume and potpourri and a light citrus cleaner were comforting. "I'm supposed to just disappear? Again?"

"I'm sorry, but yes," Floyd said gently. "I'll have your apartment packed up and your things sent to you when you're ready for them."

"I'll have to cancel my lease," she said, half to herself. "Are you sure my leaving witness protection is safe?"

"It's a risk. I won't lie. Nobody would blame you if you said no. If you say no, we can all just forget about this conversation."

"I can't do that," Laura said quickly. "Not if my dad really needs me."

"I think he does," the marshal said.

She trusted Floyd. He had never lied to her or put her in unnecessary danger.

She was going home. Aunt Joy needed her. Her father needed her. And then she would have to start all over again.

Having the marshal here and disappearing without notice meant her identity had now been compromised. After everything was done, she'd have to be moved, assigned another fake name and background. Get another job.

Sadness tugged at her. She'd made friends here and she really liked the store's owner, Ann Childress, but

Laura had never let herself forget that she might someday have to leave. And now someday was here.

"We should get going," Devaney said.

Still off balance, Laura nodded slowly.

He frowned. "I'd rather you ride with me, but we can't leave your car here."

"Because it would look as if something bad happened to me."

He nodded.

"I'll have to call my boss," she said faintly. "If it's okay, I'll tell her it's a family emergency and make sure she knows I won't be back."

She glanced at Floyd. "So, we'll drive to Oklahoma City?"

"No," the older man said. "I won't be going with you. I'll meet you there later. Devaney has brought Enigma's jet."

"Jet?"

"The pilot is on standby," her new protector put in. "We can leave your car covered and in the hangar where the plane is stored. I'll follow behind you. Do you know how to get to the airport?"

"I didn't even know Pueblo had one."

After a last look around, she grabbed her winter coat and followed the men outside. Floyd put a hand on her shoulder.

"I wouldn't have brought Devaney here if I hadn't checked him out forward and backward. The director personally vouched for him. If I thought for one minute this guy wasn't on the level or that he couldn't protect you, I would've sent him packing."

Aware of how careful the marshal had been with her up to this point, Laura knew that was true. Even so, she was nervous. Vin was alive and as long as he was, she was in danger.

Devaney waited for her to lock up, then gave her directions to the airport. In the darkness, he was nearly invisible until he slid behind the wheel of a dark sedan. She said goodbye to Floyd, then settled into her red compact. After the taillights of the older man's SUV disappeared, Devaney waved her out of the parking lot and followed.

He appeared able to protect her. She hoped he was, but what if she needed to be protected from *him?* The thought drew her up short. Where had that come from?

She drove through the quiet streetlamp-lit streets of Pueblo, glancing in her rearview mirror frequently.

The man who'd come for her stayed close as she battled a mix of resentment and fear and uncertainty.

Griffin Devaney had wrecked her manufactured life like an EF5 tornado. He hadn't just brought up her past. He was sweeping her right back into it.

* * *

Laura's aunt hadn't met them at the airport as expected. Instead, she'd had to rush Laura's father to the hospital.

Being back in Oklahoma City felt surreal. The plane ride and the composure of the man beside her had helped lessen some of the fear she'd felt at Griffin Devaney's appearance, but not the apprehension or the uncertainty. As a result, conversation had been sparse.

During the drive to OU Medical Center, she was jumpy. What if Vin somehow learned she had surfaced? What if despite his need, her father didn't want to see her?

She flattened a hand on her stomach, trying to still the flutters there. They weren't all due strictly to anxiety. Devaney set off surprising flutters of his own.

She slid a look at the solidly built man behind the steering wheel. Occasionally, light from the streetlamps slanted across him, the shadows doing nothing to soften the carved-rock line of his jaw.

What was his story? Beneath the nerves, the uncertainty and wariness, she was intrigued by the man who'd found her. More curious about him than she'd been about any man in a long time.

Uncomfortable with the realization, Laura forced herself to focus on the reason she was here, not the grimly handsome man beside her.

What had happened between her and her dad had been just as much his fault as Laura's, but she didn't know if Nolan Prentiss would see it that way. And it didn't matter. She had forgiven him and hoped he could do the same.

Not much had changed in the months since she'd been away from Oklahoma City. Though she didn't see anything new on the drive from the airpark, she was unexpectedly nostalgic at the sight of the illuminated dome of the state capitol as they traveled I-235 South.

Farther south and east than their destination was Bricktown, a bustling area of downtown that boasted restaurants, a ballpark and the arena for Oklahoma City's NBA team, the Thunder.

Everything might look mostly the same, but it didn't feel the same. Thirty minutes after leaving Sundance Airpark, she found herself at OU Medical Center. Griffin whipped his SUV into a parking spot in the lot of the hospital where her father had been admitted.

The temperature here was about the same as it had been in Pueblo and Laura snuggled her face into the collar of her heavy coat. Neither she nor her companion spoke as they rode the elevator to the seventh-floor oncology ward. Even though she didn't know Griffin, Laura was glad not to be alone. His quiet steadiness helped settle her somewhat.

They got off the elevator and turned left, passing an open family waiting area. Another bank of elevators sat at the opposite end of the long hallway. A second nurse's station served visitors in that area. Several yards

away, Laura hesitated and Griffin stopped beside her.

"Are you nervous?" he asked.

"I— Yes." She hadn't faced her father in years. Though she intended to see him—she had come out of WitSec for this—she had no idea what kind of reception she would get.

The area was quiet, the only sounds the occasional beep of machines and the heave of a heater. After asking about Nolan Prentiss's location, she explained she was a family friend who had been asked to come. In answer, the pretty red-haired nurse at the desk gestured down the hall toward a patient room.

"Mr. Prentiss has already started his conditioning," the woman explained. "Before you go in, you'll need to put on this mask and gown."

"Conditioning?" Laura asked.

"He's undergoing chemo to kill his bad cells."

The tap-tap of a pair of heels interrupted them. Laura turned to see her aunt coming down the hall, shedding a mask and gown.

Looking smart in a pink sweater and dark slacks, the older woman rushed toward her and grabbed her in a big hug.

"Thanks for coming," Joy said thickly, her blue eyes bright with emotion. She lowered her voice. "I didn't know if I would ever see you again."

Laura had wondered, too. Tears burned her throat and she returned the embrace.

Joy stepped back. "You look beautiful. Your hair's grown."

She put an arm around Laura's shoulders. "You can see Nolan if you'd like, but he's heavily drugged and unresponsive."

"I won't go inside, but I would like to look in on him." She peeked inside the room, taking in the hospital bed flanked by an IV bag and a blood-pressure-and-heart monitor. Her gaze went to the man lying motionless under a light blanket.

Her breath caught. Nolan Prentiss, always trim and fit, looked emaciated. His normally ruddy coloring was gray, his blue eyes closed, his brow furrowed as if in pain. He didn't stir.

Laura sent a questioning glance to her aunt.

"He's on morphine for pain. He hasn't been conscious since we arrived earlier, but it's for the best."

"What pain?"

"In his back and stomach. His back started hurting about two weeks ago and his oncologist confirmed it was a relapse of the lymphoma. Nolan called me today when the pain became so severe he couldn't even stand

up. I brought him straight here and they admitted him."

Laura swallowed hard, keeping her voice quiet. "Mr. Devaney said Dad was diagnosed nine months ago for non-Hodgkin's lymphoma."

"Yes, a type called diffuse large B-cell."

She had no idea what it was, but it sounded bad. Laura's stomach knotted. She couldn't remember ever seeing her father like this. She wanted him to open his eyes and look at her even though her emotions were a mix of love, regret and shame.

Torn between going in or leaving her father in peace, Laura shifted beside her aunt. Nolan's raven hair had turned completely white. He was frail. For the first time in her life, she thought of her father as something other than strong and unyielding. Life had taken its toll on him, just as it had on her.

"Let's come back later." Her aunt closed the door and steered her away.

Devaney fell into step on Joy's other side. The older woman gave him a quick hug. "Thank you for bringing Laura."

Griffin smiled, his hard features softening, his blue-green eyes warming.

The change in his face made Laura a little weak in the knees, which completely shocked her. She jerked her gaze away. Oh, please. She was tired. That was why she'd felt that little wobble.

Retracing their steps, they made their way to the waiting area they'd seen when they stepped off the elevator. Among the groupings of chairs, there was a television on the wall. One section of chairs was broken up with a small table and phone in the middle. A long couch sat on the adjacent wall.

People clustered in groups of two or three along the near wall. Laura walked across to the less populated side of the room with her aunt and took a chair. Griffin eased down onto the gray sofa.

Joy dabbed at her damp eyes, lowering her voice. "The person who originally volunteered to be Nolan's donor is ill. Thank goodness your blood sample was on file with the register. I was tested, too. Siblings have the best chance of having the same HLA molecules, but I wasn't a match at all."

"HLA molecules?"

"Antibodies that are proteins in the blood and could interfere with the success of the transplant. There's only a twenty-five percent chance that I would be a perfect match. The chances are even more slim that the parents or children of a patient will match."

Laura frowned. "But I'm a match?"

"Yes, praise the Lord." A determined look crossed Joy's face. "I've been praying that you would be able to help your father and now you are. God doesn't pay attention to percentages."

Still shaken by seeing her larger-than-life father in such a feeble state, Laura was hit with a sense of urgency. "What do I need to do? Shouldn't we get started?"

"You'll undergo some tests to make sure you're healthy enough to donate."

"What kind of tests?"

"Joy?" The red-haired nurse who had directed them earlier appeared in the doorway. Her name tag read Cheryl. "Sorry to interrupt, but I understand this is the visitor you want to be tested."

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Pat Billings:

Information is provisions for individuals to get better life, information nowadays can get by anyone from everywhere. The information can be a understanding or any news even a problem. What people must be consider when those information which is inside former life are challenging be find than now is taking seriously which one is suitable to believe or which one often the resource are convinced. If you have the unstable resource then you get it as your main information you will see huge disadvantage for you. All those possibilities will not happen with you if you take Witness Undercover (Love Inspired Suspense) as the daily resource information.

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Christine Smith:

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Christopher Gobert:

In this particular era which is the greater person or who has ability to do something more are more special than other. Do you want to become among it? It is just simple solution to have that. What you have to do is

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