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Darkness

By Karen Robards



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New York Times bestselling author Karen Robards continues her penchant for “fantastic storytelling” (*RT Book Reviews*) with this next heart-pumping romantic suspense novel, the tale of a brilliant ornithologist trapped on the remote Attu Island in Alaska, fighting for her life—and that of a handsome stranger—before they’re swallowed up in darkness forever.

BOOM. That’s the sound that changes everything for Dr. Gina Sullivan, a renowned ornithologist on a group research grant trip on the remote island of Attu, Alaska. When an everyday outing turns sinister at the onset of one of Attu’s infamous storms, Gina expects thunder and lightning—but what she doesn’t see coming is the small jet plane that drops out of the sky and into the water mere feet from her boat. Even more unprecedented: there’s a sole survivor from the crash, and he needs Gina’s help. But it turns out that rescuing the stranger and getting them both out of the oncoming storm is just the beginning. Because the more Gina learns about James “Cal” Callahan, he of brooding eyes and muscled frame, the more she fears—for herself, and for him.

Cal has made a career of trading on government secrets and emerging unscathed—until a routine pickup goes horribly wrong and lands him in ice-cold water. Literally. He knows the plane crash was no accident and that there could very well be an enemy force currently combing the Alaskan island ensuring there were no survivors. Now if only the arrestingly beautiful bird-watcher with the clear-blue gaze would stop watching him, well, like a hawk. Cal convinces Gina to return to base camp and help him covertly get off the island. But when Gina makes it safely back to camp and finds her entire team murdered, all bets are off, and as darkness envelops the island, she must decide: trust a man she barely knows, or go it alone and risk running straight into the arms of a killer?



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Darkness By Karen Robards Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #376860 in Books
- Published on: 2016-03-29
- Released on: 2016-03-29
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.00" h x 1.20" w x 6.00" l, .0 pounds
- Binding: Hardcover
- 384 pages



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Editorial Review

About the Author

Karen Robards is the author of more than forty novels and one novella. A regular on the *New York Times*, *USA TODAY*, and *Publishers Weekly* bestseller lists, among others. She is the mother of three boys and lives in Louisville, Kentucky.

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Darkness

Chapter One



It was an ordinary flight, on an ordinary day, full of ordinary people.

Until it wasn't.

"Eww, gross." Nine-year-old Elijah Samuels jabbed an elbow into the ribs of his thirteen-year-old sister, Abigail, and pointed at the couple kissing in front of them. Blue-eyed, blond-haired Lije, as he was called, was sturdy and tan from three weeks spent hitting the beach with his accountant father, who'd moved to Burbank after his divorce from the children's mother the previous summer. Abby was sturdy and tan, too, with sunny streaks in her long, brown braid and a pair of gold studs in her newly pierced ears, a dad-authorized act that she was afraid her mom was going to freak out over. The siblings were near the end of what had been a long line of passengers waiting to hand over their boarding passes and walk down the ramp to take their seats on the Airbus A320. Flight 155 was scheduled to carry them from LAX to Washington Dulles, where their mother would meet them. It was a Saturday, and a new school year would begin on Monday.

"Don't point," Abby hissed under her breath, smacking her brother on the shoulder.

"Don't hit," Lije retorted, jerking away and making a face at her.

The kissing couple, Mia and Nate Smolski, broke apart as they reached the turnstile. Nate handed over his boarding pass as Mia looked around to smile at Abby and Lije, having clearly overheard their exchange. A radiant smile lit up her thin face and made the slim brunette briefly beautiful. A long-distance runner who had attended UCLA on a scholarship, she was twenty-three years old and a newly minted nurse. Nate was twenty-six, a salesman for his uncle's car dealership. They'd gotten married the previous afternoon, and this flight was the first leg of their honeymoon. Mia followed her new husband on board, and Lije and Abby, still exchanging evil looks, followed them.

In line behind Lije and Abby were two businessmen, Don Miller and Gary Henderson. Both worked in the marketing department of a research and development company. They'd spent the week in Southern California pitching their company's services to various clients, and were glad to be going home. Both were in their forties, both married with children.

The Garcia family of Alexandria, Virginia, boarded next: grandmother Rita, mom Haylie, dad Jason, and their two-year-old twin daughters, Gracie and Helen. Grandmother and Mom were each lugging a child, and Dad was carrying two car seats and what looked like four or five backpacks. All looked tired and harassed, except the children, who were asleep on the women's respective shoulders.

Edward Thomas Jorgensen was behind the Garcias. A tall, fit man of thirty-nine, he was neatly dressed in a polo shirt and khakis and carried a briefcase. He was unmarried, childless, currently unemployed.

Nine more people boarded after Jorgensen, for a total of 243 passengers on board. The plane also carried twelve crew members.

Flight 155 took off twenty-eight minutes late at 12:58 p.m. Blue skies, perfect flying weather.

One hour and fifty minutes later, still enjoying perfect flying weather, the Airbus A320 slammed into the side of a mountain just outside of Denver.

There were no survivors.

No cause for the crash could be determined.

NOVEMBER, ONE YEAR LATER, KAZAKHSTAN

The private jet bumped over a narrow strip of pavement as it touched down. At the end of the little-used runway in a cleared area of forest a few miles outside of Aktau, Kazakhstan, a trio of covered military-style trucks pointing their headlights toward the taxiing plane provided the only illumination. It was dark, it was snowing furiously, and those trucks held one wayward American citizen and a whole bunch of rifle-toting members of the Kazakh Armed Forces.

None of those things were designed to make James "Cal" Callahan feel all warm and fuzzy inside. The plane executed a neat one-eighty as it reached the end of the runway, turning its nose back the way they'd come so that takeoff could happen quickly.

"Keep the engines running," Cal directed the pilot, Tim Hendricks. Easing the jet to a halt, Hendricks nodded. A wiry six-two, Hendricks was, like Cal and Ezra Brown, the third member of their party, former Air Force Special Operations Command, also known as AFSOCs or, more commonly, Air Commandos.

"Think there'll be trouble?" Ezra asked, following him to the door. Ezra was Cal's backup, his second gun, and a friend. About Cal's own height at six-four, Ezra was meatier, bald as an egg, and heavily tattooed, including a Celtic cross on his left cheek. Cal himself was more conventional looking, with neatly cut black hair, even features, and no tattoos. Despite the dark business suits that proclaimed their civilian status, they made a formidable-looking pair.

"Shouldn't be, but you never know," Cal said as the door opened and the stairs descended. "Let's make this fast."

The small leather satchel he carried as he stepped out into the biting cold held five million dollars' worth of diamonds. They weren't his diamonds, and it wasn't his money that had bought them: it belonged to the CIA, or, more properly, the US government. But the US government didn't pay ransom.

Unless it decided it wanted to. Then it employed private contractors like Cal to do the dirty work, thus keeping its official nose clean.

Ezra strode past him, taking up a position far enough to his right that even a spray of bullets couldn't get them both at the same time. The missile launcher on his shoulder was aimed squarely at the trucks. The AK-47 slung on its strap over his shoulder was for stragglers if the missile launcher should prove less than one hundred percent effective.

Eyes narrowed against the blowing snow, Cal started walking toward the trucks.

He'd done a lot of things he didn't want to do in his thirty-four years of life. One way or another, most of them had been for money.

Getting Rudy Delgado out of Kazakhstan was about to be one of them.

Rudy was a computer hacker. One of the best. Ten years before, under the cover of his legitimate day job as an IT specialist for the CIA, he'd gone into the system, found and publicly exposed dozens of clandestine operations that at that time had been under way in the Middle East, with the justification that he opposed the United States' presence there. The public uproar had been enormous. The private backlash had cost serving officers their lives.

Having thus royally screwed the pooch, Rudy had fled the country, eventually winding up in Russia. In the years since, he'd continued working in IT, only for that country's security services. It had been a sweet deal: Rudy did what the Russian government wanted, and they protected him from the Americans and let him live.

Only Rudy being Rudy, he'd gotten ambitious. He'd hacked his way into their classified files and started poking around.

The Russians being the Russians, they hadn't liked that.

Nor had they liked what he'd found.

Rudy had fled again.

This time everybody and his mother was after him.

He'd wound up in Kazakhstan, where, via his specialty, the Internet, he dropped a bombshell on his former bosses at the CIA: he knew what had caused the crash of Flight 155 outside of Denver last year. He was prepared to trade the information, plus provide irrefutable proof of what he claimed, for a ride back to the States and a guarantee of immunity from prosecution once he got there.

His former bosses took the deal, but a complication arose. Rudy was arrested for some minor offense in Chapaev and wound up in the custody of the Kazakhstani government.

Which decided, clandestinely, to auction him off to the highest bidder.

The CIA won, and thus here Cal and company were.

Just another day at the office.

Three men emerged from the cab of the center truck and walked toward Cal. Two were tall and straight in their military uniforms. The third, the one in the middle, was short, round, bespectacled Rudy.

It was, in Cal's opinion, a poor trade for five million dollars' worth of diamonds, but what the US government did with its money wasn't his call to make.

"Salaam." Cal greeted the soldiers in their language, bowing his head in accordance with the custom. They nodded curtly. Not great believers in small talk, apparently, he observed to himself, which made them his kind of guys.

The soldier on the left held out his hand for the satchel. Cal handed it over. The soldier opened it up, thrust a gloved hand inside, rooted around. Apparently satisfied, he grunted, "Zhaksa," which meant "good," and closed the satchel back up again.

The soldier on the right, who'd had a hand wrapped around Rudy's arm, thrust Rudy toward Cal. As Rudy stumbled forward, the soldiers turned around and left, striding swiftly back toward the trucks.

Cal grabbed Rudy's arm in turn and started hustling him back toward the plane, which waited with steps down and engine running just ahead of them. The fuselage gleamed silver where the headlights struck it; the logo—a circle with two wavy lines under it—painted on the sides and tail gave it the look of a sleek corporate jet, which Cal supposed was the point.

The truth was he didn't really give a damn about the plane's aesthetics, especially not now—these crucial few seconds, where the Kazakhs had the diamonds and he, Ezra, and Rudy were still outside the jet, were the most likely time for an attack.

"You're American?" Rudy gasped, breathless from the pace, as he looked up at Cal. Way up, because Rudy was maybe five-five. Beneath a red knit cap with a tassel at the crown, Rudy had scared-looking hazel eyes framed by wire-rimmed glasses, a big nose, a small mouth, and a round, pale face. Besides the cap, he was wearing a black fleece jacket zipped up to the neck, jeans, and sneakers. No backpack, no gear.

"You got proof of what you say happened to that plane? Because I want to see it," was Cal's reply. Cal had been offered a nice bonus on top of his fee if he made sure Rudy brought the promised "proof" with him. Of course, if Rudy couldn't produce the proof, he'd still take Rudy back with him to the States. Rudy just might not like his reception at the other end.

"Yeah, sure. See?" Digging in his jeans pocket, Rudy came up with a small object that Cal had to squint at for a second before he recognized it: a flash drive.

Cal grunted and took the flash drive from Rudy, who looked like he wanted to protest but didn't quite dare. Then they were at the plane steps. Shooing Rudy up the stairs, Cal glanced back at the trucks. They were still there at the end of the runway, still politely lighting up the pavement, waiting for their guests to leave.

"Easy enough," Ezra said, coming up behind him.

"Seems like it," Cal replied, and followed Rudy into the plane.

A few minutes later, they lifted off into what looked to be the start of a beautiful day.

Until it wasn't.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Ronald Fowler:

Reading a book tends to be new life style in this era globalization. With studying you can get a lot of information that can give you benefit in your life. Having book everyone in this world can share their idea. Books can also inspire a lot of people. Plenty of author can inspire all their reader with their story as well as their experience. Not only the storyline that share in the books. But also they write about advantage about something that you need example. How to get the good score toefl, or how to teach your young ones, there are many kinds of book that exist now. The authors in this world always try to improve their ability in writing, they also doing some investigation before they write on their book. One of them is this Darkness.

Willette Bickel:

A lot of people always spent their free time to vacation or go to the outside with them household or their friend. Did you know? Many a lot of people spent these people free time just watching TV, or maybe playing video games all day long. If you wish to try to find a new activity that's look different you can read any book. It is really fun for you personally. If you enjoy the book you read you can spent all day long to reading a publication. The book Darkness it is quite good to read. There are a lot of people who recommended this book. These people were enjoying reading this book. When you did not have enough space to create this book you can buy the particular e-book. You can m0ore effortlessly to read this book out of your smart phone. The price is not too costly but this book has high quality.

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