



Risk No Secrets (Black Ops, Inc.)

By Cindy Gerard

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A deadly international mission reunites a sexy Black Ops, Inc. hero and his sizzling former love in Cindy Gerard's seductive new romantic thriller.

A RED-HOT ATTRACTION . . .

Twelve years of chasing bad guys didn't erase beautiful Sophie Baylor from Wyatt Savage's memory. If he had another chance, he'd never let her leave. So when she tracks him down from El Salvador and begs for help, he doesn't ask questions—he just goes.

STARTS WITH A TERRIFYING THREAT . . .

Sophie is grateful her daughter survived a kidnapping attempt, but she won't forgive herself until the girl who was mistakenly abducted is safe. Wyatt is the only man brave enough to take on the mysterious terrorists behind the crime—and the one irresistible man she wishes she had never let go.

. . . AND UNLEASHES AN UNFORGETTABLE ADVENTURE.

Sophie knows Central America's steamy jungles and sticky politics better than anyone. Yet she refuses to hide in fear. Then she becomes the enemy's number one target. Wyatt lost her once, and he won't lose her again—even if he has to fight, kill, or die to save her.



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Editorial Review

About the Author

Cindy Gerard is the critically acclaimed *New York Times* and *USA Today* bestselling author of the wildly popular Black Ops series, the Bodyguards series, and more than thirty contemporary romance novels. Her latest books include the One-Eyed Jacks novels *Killing Time*, *Running Blind*, and *The Way Home*. Her work has won the prestigious RITA Award for Best Romantic Suspense. She and her husband live in the Midwest. Visit her online at CindyGerard.com.

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Risk No Secrets

1



The old cargo van caught Sophie's attention the moment she stepped outside the Baylor Middle School's double front doors. Instantly wary, she stopped on the top step and squinted into the blinding El Salvador sun. The vehicle was black and beat-up, the windows tinted dark. It was also as out of place as a tank on this street lined with school buses and high-dollar limos parked right alongside used compact cars driven by parents or nannies or maids waiting to pick up their kids on the last day before the school's summer break.

The van crawled like a heavy-bellied lizard stalking prey through street traffic that was thick and harried, stop-and-go. Students laughing and happily leaving the campus jammed the cracked sidewalks, the dirt-packed schoolyard, and the littered curb. All of the kids were anxious for summer to start. All of them were looking for their rides. All of them knew to beware of strange vehicles. Yet in their excitement to start their break, they all seemed oblivious to the possibility of a predator among them.

Sophie had made the difficult decision to dismiss classes three days earlier than planned. It was a precautionary measure after a rash of kidnappings for ransom had paralyzed the community. Her heart ached for the two children who had not yet been returned. Her anger boiled at the thought of the ruthless monsters who preyed on a parent's terror and for the corruption and ineptitude of the San Salvador policía who had been criminally incompetent in their efforts at recovery.

Not again, Sophie thought, never taking her eyes off the van as she dug into her pocket for her whistle. Another child was not going to be abducted. Not from her school and not on her watch. Her students were well versed in what to do if she or any of her teachers sounded three sharp, shrill blasts. She was just about to sound the alarm when the van moved on down the street and disappeared.

She drew a deep breath, let it out with a mixture of relief and embarrassment. Vigilance was one thing. Panic and paranoia, however, did not look good on a school administrator. It wasn't very reassuring to the children, either.

"Whoa." Sophie laughed and caught her balance when little Juan Gomez ran up to her and wrapped his arms around her hips.

“Le echaré de menos, Señora Weber.”

Sophie bent down to return Juan’s hug. He smelled like youth and summer. The ten-year-old was a darling little boy. He’d come a long way from the shy, illiterate waif who’d arrived two years ago, wide-eyed and frightened and on a track to follow his older brother’s footsteps straight into the violent Mara Salvatrucha gang.

“I’ll miss you, too, sweetie, but I’ll see you in the fall, okay? In the meantime, don’t forget your summer reading.”

“I won’t.”

No, he wouldn’t, Sophie thought as the child waved good-bye and skipped down the steps. The Baylor School had opened up a new world to Juan. A future that promised something more than poverty and despair. She grinned as he disappeared into the milling crowd of students, some of whom were privileged and some of whom were poor. To ensure minimal class distinction, they all wore the standard school uniform of white short-sleeve shirts and khaki shorts or skirts. To ensure equality, many of them had been awarded scholarships that came with the promise of a future they would never have had without her school. Juan was one of those children.

She breathed deeply of the fragrant blossoms of a row of mature white coffee-bean trees lining the schoolyard. She would miss that scent and her kids during summer break. She worried about them, encouraged them, stood up for them. Granted, only one of the two hundred and fifteen middle-school students was actually her child, but she considered all of them her kids. Because this was her school. The school she’d made happen five years ago in a part of the city where those most in need usually did without.

Her sense of satisfaction was tempered with the wish that she could do even more. With Diego Montoya’s help, perhaps she could.

She thought about the handsome coffee baron, knew he was still waiting for a response regarding his invitation to take her and Hope to Honolulu, where he wanted to show them Punahou School, a progressive college-prep school that could serve as a model for further development of Baylor or one of the schools she hoped to open in the future.

She sighed deeply and wondered what she should do about Diego. He was persistent, she’d give him that. Had been ever since her divorce. Since he was also a major benefactor not only to Baylor’s scholarship fund but also to the general operation budget, she couldn’t afford simply to brush him off. Frankly, she wasn’t sure if she wanted to. Diego was … well, he was a very attractive man. A very powerful man. At times, he could also be an intimidating man, and he’d made it very clear that his interest in her went beyond professional. She supposed she should feel flattered, but in actuality, she wasn’t sure what she felt.

It wasn’t that she didn’t trust him. He’d never given her reason not to. But something—she didn’t know what. Couldn’t pinpoint it, but for all of his polished manners, good looks, and generosity, he made her a little bit uncomfortable. Maybe it was simply all that overstated Latin charm. She wasn’t accustomed to such blatant and unabashed attention.

Tomorrow, she thought, would be soon enough to tackle that problem. Today, she still had paperwork to finish up before she could call it a day.

“You can smell the freedom in the air, can’t you?”

Sophie grinned at Maris Hoffman when her vice principal joined her on the front steps, her pretty brown eyes sparkling, her native German tongue barely discernible anymore when she spoke English.

“Do you remember that feeling?” Sophie asked her, congratulating herself again for having had the foresight and good fortune to hire Maris two years ago. Maris had proven to be an exemplary educator and administrator and also a trusted and cherished friend. “Being young and free with nothing ahead of you to worry about but summer sun and fun?”

“Oh. You thought I meant the kids?” Maris laughed and brushed a straight fall of auburn hair out of her eyes. “I was talking about me. Two months without calls from parents, schoolboard meetings, and doling out detention. Ah, yes, the sweet scent of freedom.”

“If I didn’t already know that the next couple of months, you’ll be pouring your heart and soul into curriculum content and ways to increase the quota on scholarship students, I’d buy that line.”

Maris lifted a shoulder. “Oh, well. A girl can dream. So what’s on your agenda for the summer?”

“Haven’t thought that far ahead.” Well, if she didn’t count Diego’s tantalizing yet somehow manipulative offer of that trip to Hawaii.

Maris pushed out a huff. “And you accuse me of being dedicated.”

Yes, Sophie thought again, all the stars had aligned when Maris interviewed two years ago. “Lunch next week?” she suggested as Maris turned to go back inside.

“Sure. Give me a call in a couple of days. I’ve been dying to try that new place that was written up in the paper last week.”

Sophie turned to follow Maris back inside and hit that paperwork but paused and smiled when she spotted Hope. Her lovely yet currently gangly daughter stood by the curb, chatting with her “BFF” Lola Ramirez, while waiting for Lola’s mother to pick them both up. Peas in a pod, those two. Both wore their dark hair straight to the middle of their backs, with thick bangs falling over their foreheads. And both so wanted to be older than twelve.

Too soon, she thought, watching them. Too soon, Hope would get her wish. Her daughter was growing up, a truth that both saddened and thrilled her.

Hope caught her eye just then and waved. When Lola also spotted her, she waved to Sophie, too. Smiling widely, Sophie lifted her hand to return their greeting—then froze on a sudden clutch of alarm when the black van reappeared out of nowhere, careening down the street, motor racing.

The van wove recklessly among the waiting cars, then screeched to a stop by the curb where her daughter stood.

Sophie’s heart slammed into her ribs like a fist. She grabbed her whistle, gave it three short, sharp blasts, and sprinted down the steps, her heart racing as fear shot adrenaline through her blood like jet fuel.

“Run! Hope, run!” she cried as the side door of the van flew open.

A man jumped out; he headed straight for Hope.

“No!” Sophie yelled, her breath catching as knots of frightened children cried and screamed and ran for safety.

She raced toward her daughter, but by the time she reached the street, it was too late. The driver gunned the motor, took the corner on two wheels, and sped off—stealing a piece of Sophie’s heart as the van disappeared.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Larry Valadez:

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Eric Sanders:

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