



Up Close and Dangerous: A Novel

By Linda Howard

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A mysterious plane crash . . . a dangerous trek through the Idaho wilderness . . . a smoldering attraction . . . and a deadly game of cat and mouse. In her latest tour de force of romantic suspense, New York Times bestselling author Linda Howard blends these elements into a gripping story that will keep readers breathless—and leave them begging for more. For in Linda Howard's world, trust can be a weapon, a kiss can be a threat, and intimacy can be deadly.

Bailey Wingate's scheming adult stepchildren are surprised when their father's will leaves Bailey in control of their fortune, and war ensues. A year later, while flying from Seattle to Denver in a small plane, Bailey nearly dies herself when the engine sputters—and then fails.

Cam Justice, her sexy Texan pilot, manages to crash-land the aircraft. Stranded in the wilderness, and struggling to douse her feelings for the ruggedly handsome man by her side, Bailey begins to wonder whether this was a mere accident. Who tampered with their plane? Who's trying to reunite Bailey and her husband in the afterlife? Cut off from the world, and with little hope of rescue, Bailey must trust her life—and heart—to Cam, as they battle the harsh elements to find a way out of the unforgiving wilds and back to civilization . . . where a killer may be waiting to finish the job.

Sexy, suspenseful, and lightning fast, *Up Close and Dangerous* showcases a beloved author at her dazzling best.

From the Hardcover edition.

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Linda Howard is the award-winning author of many New York Times bestsellers, including *Drop Dead Gorgeous*, *Cover of Night*, *Killing Time*, *To Die For*, *Kiss Me While I Sleep*, *Cry No More*, *Dying to Please*, *Open Season*, *Mr. Perfect*, *All the Queen's Men*, *Now You See Her*, *Kill and Tell*, and *Son of the Morning*. She lives in Alabama with her husband and two golden retrievers.

From the Hardcover edition.

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1

Bailey Wingate woke up crying. Again.

She hated when she did that, because she couldn't see any reason for being such a wuss. If she were desperately unhappy, if she were lonely or grieving, crying in her sleep would make sense, but she wasn't any of those things. At worst, she was pissed.

Even being pissed wasn't a full-time attitude; that came only when she had to deal with her stepchildren, Seth and Tamzin, which, thank God, usually happened only once a month when she signed off on the allotted funds they received from their inheritance from her late husband. They almost always contacted her then, either before to make their pitches for more money, which she had yet to approve, or afterward to let her know, in their individual ways, what a scummy bitch they thought she was.

Seth was by far the most vicious, and more times than she cared to count he'd left her emotionally bruised, but at least he was forthright with his hostility. As tough as he was to take, Bailey preferred dealing with him to having to wade her way through Tamzin's passive-aggressive crap.

Today was the day their monthly funds were released to their bank accounts, which meant she could look forward to either their phone calls or actual visits. Oh, joy. One of Tamzin's favorite punishments was to visit, and bring her two young children. Tamzin alone was tough enough to take, but when her two whiny, spoiled, demanding children were added to the mix, Bailey felt like running for the hills.

"I should have asked for combat pay," she grumbled aloud as she threw back the covers and got out of bed.

Then she mentally snorted at herself. She had nothing to complain about, much less cry in her sleep over. She'd agreed to marry James Wingate knowing what his children were like, and how they would react to their father's financial arrangements for them. He had, in fact, banked on those reactions and planned accordingly. She had gone into the situation with her eyes open, so she had no grounds for complaining now. Even from the grave, Jim was paying her well to do her job.

Going into the plush bathroom, she glanced at her reflection—something that was difficult not to do when the first thing she faced was a floor-to-ceiling mirror. Sometimes, when she saw herself, she had a moment of almost complete disconnect between the person reflected and what she felt like inside.

Money had changed her—not inside so much as outside. She was slimmer, more toned, because now she had both the time and the money for a personal trainer who came to the house and put her through hell in the private exercise room. Her hair, before always a sort of dirty blond, was now so artfully streaked with different hues of blond that it looked completely natural. An expensive cut flattered her face, and fell into such graceful lines that even now, fresh out of bed, her hair looked pretty damn good.

She had always been neat, and she had dressed as well as she could on her salary, but there was a world of difference between “neat” and “polished.” She had never been beautiful, and certainly wouldn’t qualify for that level of good looks even now, but she did sometimes reach “pretty,” or even “striking.” Skillful application of the best cosmetics available made the green of her eyes more intense, more vibrant. Her clothes were tailored to fit her and only her, instead of millions of other women who were the same general size.

As Jim’s widow, she had the full and unquestioned use of this house in Seattle, one in Palm Beach, and another in Maine. She never had to fly on a commercial airline unless she wished to; the Wingate corporation leased private jets for its use, and a plane was always available to her. She paid only for her personal possessions, which meant she didn’t have to worry about bills. That was undeniably the biggest bright spot of the deal she’d made with the man who had married her and, in less than a year, made her a widow.

Bailey had been poor, and though amassing wealth had never been her life’s focus or ambition, she had to admit that having money made life much easier. She still had problems, the main ones being Seth and Tamzin, but problems felt different when they didn’t involve paying bills on time: the sense of urgency was gone.

All she had to do was oversee their trust funds—a duty she took very seriously even though they would never believe that—and otherwise fill her days.

God, she was bored.

Jim had thought of everything regarding his children, she thought as she stepped into the round, frosted-glass shower. He had safeguarded their inheritances; insofar as he was able he’d also ensured that they would always be financially secure, and very skillfully read their personalities while doing so. His plans, however, hadn’t included how her life would play out after he was gone.

He likely hadn’t cared, she thought ruefully. She’d been the means to an end, and even though he’d been fond of her and she of him, he’d never made any pretense of feeling anything more than that for her. Theirs had been a business arrangement, one he’d initiated and controlled. Even if he’d known beforehand, he wouldn’t have cared that his friends, who had dutifully invited her to their social events while Jim was still alive, had dropped her from their guest lists like a hot potato as soon as he was in the ground. Jim’s friends had mostly been in his age group, and a lot of them had known and been friends with Jim’s first wife, Lena. Some of them had also known Bailey from before, in her capacity as Jim’s personal assistant. They were uncomfortable with her in the role of his wife. Hell, she had been uncomfortable, so how could she blame them for feeling the same way?

This wasn’t the life she’d wanted for herself. Yes, the money was nice—very nice—but she didn’t want to spend the rest of her life doing nothing but growing money for two people who despised her. Jim had been certain that Seth’s humiliation at having his inheritance controlled by a stepmother who was three years his junior would shock him into stepping up to the plate and behaving like a responsible adult, instead of an older male version of Paris Hilton, but so far that hadn’t happened and Bailey no longer had any faith it ever

would. Seth had had plenty of chances to apply himself, to take an interest in the corporations that funded his lavish and lazy lifestyle, but he hadn't seized any of them. Seth had been Jim's hope, because Tamzin was completely disinterested in and unsuited for the type of financial decisions huge amounts of money demanded. All Tamzin was interested in was the end result, which was cash at her disposal—and she wanted all of her inheritance now, so she could spend it as she wished.

Bailey winced at the thought; if Tamzin had control of her inheritance, she would blow through the money within five years, tops. If Bailey herself didn't control the funds, someone else would have to.

The phone rang just as she turned off the shower and reached for a champagne-colored towel to wrap around herself. Wrapping another around her wet hair, she stepped out and picked up the cordless phone in the dressing room, looked at the Caller ID, and set the unit back down without answering. The number had been blocked; she had registered all her numbers on the national do-not-call list, so the blocked number wasn't likely to be a telemarketer. That meant Seth was probably up bright and early thinking of insults he could use, and she refused to deal with him before she had her coffee. Her sense of duty extended only so far, and this was beyond those boundaries.

On the other hand, what if something was wrong? Seth partied hard, seldom getting to bed before dawn—at least not his own bed. It wasn't like him to be calling this early. Feeling her boundaries stretch a little, she grabbed the phone again, punching the "talk" button even though the answering machine would have already picked up and started its spiel.

"Hello," she said over the recorded message made with the canned male voice that was the system's default. She had kept it instead of recording a message of her own because the canned one was more impersonal.

The answering system halted in midsentence when she picked up, then beeped, and clicked off.

"Hi, Mom."

Sarcasm was heavy in Seth's voice. Mentally she sighed. Nothing was wrong; Seth was just trying out a new way of annoying her. Being called "mom" by a man who was older than she didn't bother her, but dealing with him at all certainly did.

The best way to handle Seth was to show no reaction at all; eventually he'd get tired of his needling and hang up. "Seth. How are you?" she responded in the cool, even tone she'd perfected while working as Jim's PA. Neither her tone nor her expression had ever given anything away.

"Things couldn't be better," he responded with false cheer, "considering my money-hungry whore of a stepmother is living large on my money, while I can't touch it at all. But what's a little theft between relatives, right?"

Usually she let the insults roll off her back. "Whore" was one he'd pulled out the second he'd heard the provisions of his father's will. Seth had gone on to accuse her of having married his father for his money, and taken advantage of Jim's illness to persuade him to leave even his children's money in her control. He had also promised, threatened, to contest the will in court, at which time Jim's lawyer had sighed heavily and advised against such action as a waste of time and money; Jim had capably handled the reins of his empire up until the last few weeks before his death, and the will had been signed almost a year before that—the day after his marriage to Bailey, in fact.

From the Hardcover edition.

From [AudioFile](#)

Having been married to a much-older man, Bailey Wingate is now a widow--and battling her stepchildren on a daily basis. Getting away for a few days is supposed to provide a respite--but the private plane she's on, piloted by ex-Air Force officer Cameron Justice, crashes in the mountains. Both Bailey and Cameron survive, but the clock is running on their lives in the extreme conditions. Natalie Ross's reading of this action-adventure is quite skillful, holding the listener's interest even when the story's pace slows. The lazy, amused Texas drawl she gives Cam is perfect, and she also captures Bailey's strong spirit and tightly wound nature in the cadence of her speech. C.E.W. © AudioFile 2008, Portland, Maine-- *Copyright © AudioFile, Portland, Maine*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

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