

**SEEKING
ISABEL**

SACRED TRUST SERIES

BY CARRIE DAWS

SEEKING ISABEL

© 2018 by Carrie Daws
All rights reserved

Printed in the United States of America

eISBN: 978-1-947539-12-9

1. Christian fiction—contemporary. 2. Christian fiction—suspense.

Unless otherwise indicated, Scriptures are taken from THE HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Scripture quotations marked (CEV) are from the Contemporary English Version Copyright © 1991, 1992, 1995 by American Bible Society. Used by Permission.

Cover design by Jarmal Wilcox
Page Layout by Hailey Radabaugh

IMMEASURABLE WORKS
104 Harvest Ln.
Raeford, NC 28376, USA

*You will seek me and find me
when you seek me with all your heart.*

Jeremiah 29:13

New International Version

*We make our own plans,
but the Lord decides where we will go.*

Proverbs 16:9

Contemporary English Version

CHAPTER ONE

MONDAY, MARCH 14

You will find her, Samu.

Detective Samuel Campos jerked up, grabbing the 9mm handgun from his bedside table and aiming it blindly at the door to the bedroom.

“Sam?”

Blinking, he willed his eyes to clear and his mind to work in the pre-dawn light. Never shifting his aim, he turned his head to the left, then the right to look at the corners of the room. The shadows were lessening with the rising sun, but nothing moved. Well, nothing except for his wife sitting up in their bed.

“Samu?”

His wife’s voice penetrated his mind. Her use of the familiar nickname from his childhood battled with the state of alertness coursing through his body. She wouldn’t use the moniker if she was afraid.

He lowered his weapon and rubbed his face with his free hand. “It’s okay, Jules. I just—” He paused, not having the words to finish his sentence. What exactly had just happened? The voice had been so clear, so close.

He looked at his wife, who was watching him closely, waiting for an answer.

“I thought I heard something.”

“Heard something? Like someone in the house? Or God?”

As his wife, Julie, heard from God occasionally in dreams, the Almighty speaking to her didn't sound particularly strange. But the Creator of heaven and earth wasn't usually so open with him. He usually got the more subtle indications that people in his career field regarded as gut instincts.

“I'm not sure.” He shook his head. “I'm going to check the house, just to be safe. You go back to sleep.”

“Not much point.” She sighed, got out of bed, and headed toward their bathroom door, located directly behind where Sam stood. “Alarm's going off in about twenty minutes anyway. You check the house over and let me know. When you're sure it's safe, I'll get the coffee started.”

As his wife closed the door, Sam thought back to the voice. Had it been real? His body had certainly thought so. But if it had been God, who exactly was he supposed to find?

—

“Stewart! Campos!”

Sam heard Captain Lawson bellowing down the hallway. A boisterous man who was so tall that he had to duck through doorways, he never did anything quietly. Sam poked his head out of his office doorway.

“Yes, sir?”

Sam saw Detective Dominic Stewart take a step out of his office two doors down, closer to the captain.

“Both of you. My office now.”

The captain turned on his heel, retreating back into his office at the end of the hallway. Uncertain what he wanted, Sam didn't know whether to grab any of his files or not. He snatched his small notebook off his desk just to be on the safe side.

“Sit down, both of you.”

Captain Lawson believed in law and order, on the street and in the office. His furniture lined up neatly with the walls, and two empty chairs sat perfectly spaced in front of the desk that showed only the files he was working on at the moment. Dominic took the chair to the right.

“Sam, you heard about the missing teen?”

“The one all over the news, from Silver High School? Isabel, right?”

“That's the one, and she's disappeared without a trace. Stewart here is lead, the FBI is incoming, and a task force is forming from first responders here and in surrounding counties. I want you to join it.”

Sam shifted in his seat. His assigned cases were typically homicide, which included unaccompanied deaths, and arson. Missing kids, rare in their county, could include a call out for everyone to jump on board, but this request felt more specific. “Sir, do you mind if I ask why me?”

“I don't want this to come across wrong, to either one of you, but I don't know a better way to say it. This is an Hispanic teen missing from a tightly-knit Hispanic community.”

Sam glanced at Stewart, trying to gauge how his Irish Catholic co-worker was accepting this.

“Campos, coming from an Hispanic family yourself,

you understand what they're thinking. You'll be accepted and trusted on a deeper level than the rest of us."

Captain Lawson stood, his dark skinned arms crossed over his barrel chest. "Look, you both have been here long enough to know I shut down racism when I see it. But I also try to work within the cultures around us when appropriate. We need to find this girl. It's already been thirty-four hours, and the community is nervous. Stewart, get Campos up to speed, and both of you be ready to update the rest of the team. First meeting is scheduled for noon."

"Yes, sir."

Sam nodded at the captain and followed Dominic down the hall to his office. Sam had to clear the air before he could turn his attention to the case. He hadn't worked with Dominic much but knew him to be a good detective.

"We good?"

Dominic paused in reaching for a file to look at him, one copper-colored eyebrow arched high. "Man, look. Quite honestly, I'm grateful. The mom and grandma are all over me, and I could use the help. There's not a lot to go on, and every possibility is still on the table—from kidnapping to runaway. Not to mention the family keeps slipping into Spanish, and I'm working with a high school first-year fluency here."

Sam smiled. "So you can ask for a glass of water or where the bathroom is?"

Dominic motioned for Sam to have a seat while he sat down behind his desk. "Pretty much. I remember the difference between *buenos dias* and *buenos noches*—"

"*Buenas noches*," Sam said, emphasizing the second syllable on the first word.

“What?”

Sam chuckled. “Maybe you should stick to *si* and *no*.”

Dominic shook his head. “What’s the word for headache? *Dolor de la ...*”

“Hang with me, *gringo*. I’ll keep the *dolor de la cabeza* away.” Sam opened his notebook and grabbed a pen from Dominic’s desktop. “What do we know?”

“Mom and grandma left the morning of the twelfth to enjoy the weekend at the beach together. They do this once or twice a year, and usually Isabel goes with them. But the girl had a big algebra test coming up this week, and she wanted to stay home to study.”

“She chose studying over the beach?” That was never a choice Sam would have made in his teens. He wasn’t sure he’d make it now as a grown man.

“Honor roll student, near the top of her class.”

“Really? Those aren’t the type to go missing.”

“Which is why I’m leaning toward foul play. But, it’s not that clean cut.”

“What do you mean?”

“Apparently, she and the grandfather got into a heated argument about ten Saturday night. She wanted to go over to a friend’s house to study, but he refused to let her go. Said something along the lines of nothing good happens that late, I believe—*nada bueno ocurre* is what I wrote down.”

“Good translation. So, that’s the last time anyone saw her?”

“Essentially. He says he went to bed about eleven, stopping by her door. He heard her moving about but thought he’d leave her alone until morning.”

“And she was gone.”

Dominic nodded. “And she was gone.” He leaned forward to rest his arms on his desk. “That’s about all we know. I’d planned to head to the school this morning to talk to teachers. Mom was supposed to get me a list of friends to contact, although she’s been calling everyone she can think of in case Isabel ran to them. Her social media has gone quiet, which is highly suspicious for this girl. At this point, I got nothing.”

“Wow.” Sam sighed deeply. The dispute with her grandfather was interesting, but not alarming. “Let me grab my gear, and we’ll head over to the school together. Maybe they’ll give us more insight into this house than what you’ve been able to see so far.”

Sam headed down the hallway to his own office. He made sure his computer was locked and grabbed his backpack full of supplies for an emergency. A cop never knew when he was going to be pinned down and would need extra ammo, first aid supplies, or a bottle of water.

I will lead you to her, Samu.

Sam froze mid-step. He was sure it was the same voice he’d heard this morning. Now he was confident that God had planned this change in his plans for the week. He took a moment to pray under his breath. “Help me see your guiding hand, Father.”

He waited for God to say more. Instead, peace flowed over his heart and a confidence that this case would not remain unsolved. One way or another, he knew God would provide answers for this family. “Will we find her alive, Father?”

Sam waited, hoping.

“Ready to go?”

Dominic, his own backpack and a set of keys in hand, stood three steps away.

Sam nodded. “Let’s hit the road.”

CHAPTER TWO

With Isabel's family calling every person they could think of, word had spread quickly around the two-thousand-student campus of Silver Heights High School. While all the kids weren't somber and reflective, the atmosphere felt heavy for a group of teens quickly approaching spring break.

"What can you tell us about Isabel's friends?" asked Dominic, accepting Isabel's printed class schedule.

Sam had only spoken to Principal Maryanne Darby on two other occasions, only one of which was in the line of duty. The first time he'd met her was when he'd attended a friend's son's football game, and he'd helped break up a fight in the parking lot over a girl. The principal had taken charge quickly and squelched the attitudes of both boys, even though they'd both towered over her and probably outweighed her by fifty pounds each. That had opened up an opportunity for him to discuss several cold cases with her from more than twenty years ago. She hadn't been around Silver Heights then, but he was convinced the cases were linked by teens, and a few more recent cases involving teens appeared similar in small ways.

"Best I can tell you, Isabel is well liked. She's one of our brightest students, so I know her on sight, although I

can't say I talk with her much. She's always seemed happy, usually surrounded by friends when I see her."

"So you haven't noticed anything that we should be concerned about?" said Dominic. "Nothing we should check more deeply into?"

Principal Darby shook her head. "Sorry, no."

Sam glanced over the schedule Dominic handed him. "Do you know if she's close with any of her teachers? Maybe talking to one more than the others?"

"Well, not too long ago we hosted an essay contest. Nothing major, the grand prize was a gift card to a local ice cream shop. But Isabel entered and placed well. You might want to start with her English teacher."

A student walked up and stopped beside Principal Darby. The boy waited without saying anything, but when Sam made eye contact with him, he quickly looked away. Principal Darby reached out, gently grasping his upper arm.

"You might also talk with the school counselor," she said to Sam and Dominic. "As a senior, Isabel might have been talking to him about options after graduation. Now, if you'll excuse me, I need to talk to this young man."

Sam watched as she led the teen into her office and motioned for him to sit down. Instead of going around to sit at her desk, she stayed beside him, stepping back just a little to lean against her desk as she stood, crossing her arms in front of her.

"The kids respect her."

Dominic followed Sam's gaze. "At least that one."

"No, I'd wager most of them. I've seen her gain control in tougher situations. She cares, and they know it."

"So she'd tell us if she knew or suspected anything."

Sam nodded. "I think so."

"Come on, let's find that English teacher."

—

"This case doesn't make any sense." Dominic slammed the door on his unmarked police car.

Sam took another hard look around the campus before taking his seat beside Dominic. The campus lay out in an odd pattern as buildings had been added over the years when money was available. A neighborhood street ran through the center of the campus, but metal gates kept it closed to all traffic during school hours.

"Apparently well liked by everyone, respectful to her teachers, always turns her homework in on time." Sam inhaled deeply and let it out slowly.

"Where do we go from here? Everything points away from her being a runaway, but nothing yet points to foul play."

"Come on. We've got to get back for the task force meeting. We can split the team up to cover friends more quickly. Maybe we'll find some inconsistencies in their statements."

Dominic started the car and headed back toward the sheriff's office. "Maybe the FBI will have some fancy tracker or something."

"Maybe. You've confirmed mom and grandma were out of town?"

"No, just that they checked in Saturday afternoon and checked out Sunday morning after grandpa called them."

The two rode in silence. Dominic navigated the lunch

traffic on the roads, most headed in the opposite direction from them. While the sheriff's department was located near the downtown area, most of the eating establishments were on the main local highway, which skirted the boundaries of the city limits.

Sam thought back over their conversations with the teachers and school officials. They'd asked for names of friends and even talked with a couple of them before leaving. The consensus bothered Sam. No one seemed to know anything. No one saw any indication that anything was wrong. How could this girl just disappear?

"Here we go," said Dominic, driving past the front door of the department to park behind the building.

"What do you mean?"

Dominic nodded his head back toward the station. "Mom and grandma. Waiting on the sidewalk."

The men grabbed their backpacks out of the back of the car. As they approached the door to the sheriff's office, the two women rushed at them.

"We heard there's a meeting," said the woman Sam assumed to be Isabel's mother. Her eyes immediately consumed his attention. So dark brown they were almost black, they carried a mixture of hope and despair. The redness around her irises indicated a lack of sleep probably mixed with shedding a lot of tears, but she wasn't yet consumed by grief. No, fear lingered there, keeping the grief at bay for the moment.

"The FBI has been called in," said Dominic, "and representatives from other departments and surrounding counties are joining in the search."

"We've called every friend we could think of," said the

mother. “Even knocked on some doors to talk to their parents. No one’s heard from her.”

“Not even that *amiga que mi marido dijo que quería ir a verla. Ella le dijo que no sabía nada.*”

The grandmother’s hands flew about as she spoke, and as soon as she dropped into Spanish, Dominic looked helplessly at Sam.

“You spoke to the friend? The one who Isabel told your husband she wanted to study with Saturday night?”

“*Si,*” said the grandmother, reaching out to grab Sam’s hand in both of hers. “Yes. She know nothing. Nothing!”

She cried out, but whether it was in pain or in frustration, Sam wasn’t sure. He could see tears building in her eyes, and her knees started to buckle. He reached out to support her as best he could with his free hand just as her daughter grabbed the arm closest to her and another arm reached around the woman’s shoulder.

“I got her.”

Sam looked up to see friend and first responder Kelan Bratcher supporting the grandmother as she sobbed uncontrollably.

“Oh, *mamá.*” The daughter tried to comfort her mother without getting in the way of the men now keeping her from falling onto the concrete walk.

“Let’s get her sitting down inside.” Kelan looked at the daughter when he spoke.

Sam thought the younger Ms. Moreno might fall into similar hysterics at any moment. Activity sometimes helped people control emotions, so he gently encouraged her into action. “Will you go hold the door open for us?”

As she ran the few feet ahead of them, Sam moved over

to one side, and Kelan repositioned his hold. Together, they maneuvered the woman inside. As they got her seated in the waiting area with her daughter beside her, Kelan crouched in front of her, his paramedic training taking control of the situation.

“Can someone get her some water?”

“I got it,” said Dominic, turning to head through the secure door.

Sam watched Kelan’s fingers grasp the woman’s wrist to get a pulse reading, all the while talking gently to the two women. Dominic came back with two bottles of water, and Kelan grabbed one, opened it, and handed it to the grandmother.

“Here. I want you to drink this slowly. A few sips, pause, and then a few more.”

“*Gracias*,” she whispered. Taking a shaky breath, she sipped a bit of the water. Replacing the lid on top, she grasped Kelan’s hand tightly in one of hers. “Thank you. I appreciate your concern. You are part of this meeting, yes?”

“For Isabel?” Kelan nodded. “I couldn’t stay away.”

Sam watched the grandmother’s eyes fill with tears again, although this time she kept better control of herself.

“But you are a soldier,” said the mother, looking at Kelan’s Army uniform.

Kelan had started working as a paramedic volunteer with a local fire department six months ago, but his day job was as an active duty soldier stationed at Fort Bragg. Although he’d seen some combat, his current position had him working in the pediatric clinic at Womack Army Medical Center.

“I’m a member of the community,” said Kelan simply. He smiled at her warmly before refocusing on the grandmother. “Are you going to be okay?”

“For the moment.” She nodded, patting his hand one last time before she released him.

Kelan rose to stand beside Sam and Dominic, facing the sitting women.

“Can we go to this meeting?” the mother asked.

“I’m sorry,” said Dominic, simply but firmly. “Either Detective Campos or I will keep you updated.”

Sam nodded as the mother switched her attention to him. “Yes, ma’am. Whenever we have any credible leads, we’ll let you know.”

“Find my baby. Please.”

Sam knew that her eyes would haunt him at least until Isabel was found. Maybe longer if the search didn’t turn out well. Whatever had happened to the girl, he was convinced neither the mother nor the grandmother had been a part of it.

For more information about
Carrie Daws,
The Sacred Trust series,
freebies related to the series
to receive her weekly devotional newsletter,
or to find out about special promotions
please visit:

www.CarrieDaws.com

Contact@CarrieDaws.com

Facebook.com/CarrieDaws

@CarrieDaws