

Trust with Hearts

By Kelli A. Wilkins

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Trust with Hearts

After a bitter breakup, Sherrie Parker seeks refuge at her cousin Dave's house in rural West Virginia. Early one morning, she runs into Dave's other houseguest, a singer named Curtis Taylor.

The last thing Sherrie wants is to share living quarters with a country music crooner – even if he is sexy, in a cowboy sort of way.

Thrown together by circumstances, Sherrie and Curtis get off to a rocky start, but soon discover they have more in common than they ever imagined. Unable to fight their growing attraction, they give in to their desires and start a sizzling summer romance.

Everything is perfect between them until Sherrie discovers that Curtis is keeping secrets from her – and his biggest secret of all will change everything.

Can their newfound love survive, or will destiny keep them apart forever?

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ROMANCES BY KELLI A. WILKINS

*A Deceptive Match**
*A Secret Match**
*A Most Unusual Princess***
*A Most Intriguing Temptation***
*A Most Unfortunate Prince***
Beauty & the Bigfoot
Confessions of a Vampire's Lover
Dangerous Indenture
Four Days with Jack
Killer in Wolf's Clothing
Lies, Love & Redemption
Loving a Wild Stranger
*Midsummer Night's Delights****
*Midwinter Night's Delights****
Trust with Hearts
*Ultimate Night's Delights****
The Viking's Witch

* *A Deceptive Match* and *A Secret Match* are related titles with shared characters. However, each novel can be read separately.

** These titles make up the *Royal Desires* series.
Although connected, each book stands alone as an individual read.

*** These novellas complete the *Naughty Nobles* trilogy.
It is recommended that they are read in sequence.

Visit Kelli's website: www.KelliWilkins.com for additional titles as they become available.

CHAPTER 1

“How did I sleep? Are you kidding?” Sherrie leaned against the kitchen doorframe and crossed her arms over her chest. Her first night at her cousin Dave’s house had been anything but restful. “Some redneck hillbilly neighbor of yours kept me awake half the night playing the banjo.”

Dave looked up from buttering a slice of toast. “Uh... Sher, I—”

“It sounded like a sick cat in heat.” She ran her hands through her loose hair as she strolled into the yellow kitchen. “What kind of—”

She froze as she spotted a man standing at the counter, pouring himself a cup of coffee. Who was this? She yanked her short blue robe closed over her knee-length T-shirt. Why didn’t Dave warn her he had company? She wasn’t dressed.

The lanky stranger’s electric-blue eyes sparkled in her direction before he lowered his gaze. His cowboy boots clomped on the linoleum as he crossed the kitchen and sat across from Dave.

“Fraid that was me last night,” the man said. His words were accented with a heavy twang. “But you’re

mistaken. I don't play the banjo"—he paused—"I play the git-tar."

She stared at him, speechless. His deep voice made her skin tingle. Tight, faded jeans and a red T-shirt clung to his lean frame. He was sexy in a "cowboy" sort of way, but who was he?

Dave cleared his throat. "Curt, this is my cousin, Sherrie Parker. She's a bit grouchy until she's had a cup of coffee, or three. Sher, this is Curtis Taylor. He's staying down at the cottage."

She glanced at Curtis and caught him looking at her legs. He bowed his head and focused on the newspaper in front of him.

"I didn't mean to keep ya up last night. I tend to lose track of time when I'm playin' my music," he drawled.

She frowned as she poured steaming coffee into a green mug. Curtis wasn't going to get off the hook with a lame apology. She was exhausted, her head hurt, and her life had just been turned upside down. Her new housemate had picked the wrong time to start playing midnight concerts.

"Music, huh? Is that what you call it?"

Dave stood and draped an arm across her shoulders. “Curt didn’t know you were here. I realize you’re upset, but don’t take it out on us.”

She sighed. Dave was right. Under normal circumstances, she wouldn’t have a problem with Curtis playing his guitar, but at the moment, her life was anything but normal.

“Upset? Dave, you have no idea what I’ve been—” Tears welled in her eyes, and she set her coffee cup down on the counter. She wouldn’t start crying, not now, not in front of Curtis. “Excuse me. I need to be alone,” she said as she rushed out of the kitchen.

* * *

An hour later, Sherrie stood in the center of the guest room. Three battered suitcases were stacked in front of the closet. How could twenty-seven years be condensed into so little?

She closed her eyes and willed herself not to cry. Only vulnerable people cried, and she swore she’d never be vulnerable again.

Up until yesterday, her life was planned, structured, and managed down to the last detail. For the last five years, Rick had ruled her world from sunrise to sunset. But those days were over. She’d finally gotten up enough courage to walk out on the bastard.

Halfway through their latest argument, Rick had shoved her against the wall and slapped her. This time, instead of cowering and apologizing like she used to, she had pushed him back.

At that instant, everything became crystal clear. Marrying Rick would be the worst mistake of her life.

She carried a suitcase to the bed and unzipped it. Her clothes were a jumbled mess. She had packed in a rush and hadn't organized anything. That wasn't like her, but she'd been in such a hurry to leave that she didn't care about her clothes—her freedom was much more important.

Although she longed to go back to bed and pull the covers over her head, she would have to smooth things over with Dave. She didn't want him mad at her for the way she had acted this morning, but if she had stayed in the kitchen for another second she would have broken down and wept like a helpless child. Instead, she'd cried her heart out in the shower. What was she going to do now?

She looked out the lace-curtained windows and saw the guest cottage through the trees. The cabin was set back far enough from the house to give a sense of privacy, but the acoustics were perfect for sound to travel right into her bedroom.

Who was this Curtis guy anyway, and why was he staying here? Did he work for Dave? He didn't seem like he'd be in construction...

A knock at the door interrupted her thoughts, and Dave eased the door open. "Feeling better?"

"Yeah, some." She looked at Dave. They hadn't seen each other since he had moved to West Virginia, but he hadn't changed much. He still had the same dark wavy hair, soft brown eyes, and round cherub-like face she remembered.

What would she have done without him? He was four years older than her, and he'd always acted like a big brother, so it seemed natural to turn to him when she needed help. Even though she loved and trusted Dave, she had never told him—or anyone else—about Rick's abuse. It was her secret shame.

"So, what's to do for fun around here?" she asked. From the way Dave had described Bluemont to her last night, the tiny town was a far cry from Philadelphia. It had about eight hundred residents and Dave lived on the outskirts of town.

Dave leaned against the mint green wall. "We'll take a tour tomorrow. Right now, I want you to apologize to Curtis."

“Apologize? For what? *He’s* the one who kept *me* up half the night.”

“He didn’t mean any harm. He’s a guest here—”

“How long is he staying? If he’s going to play his guitar every night, maybe he should go to a hotel or—”

“Whoa, whoa... Jeeze Sher, listen to yourself. What happened to you? You never used to act like this.” Dave scowled. “After hearing Rick fill your head with crap for so long, you sound just like him.”

Her stomach tightened and she gasped. How could Dave say such a horrible thing? She was nothing like Rick.

“I know you’ve been through a lot, but don’t take your misery out on the people who are being nice to you. I know you. You’re better than this.”

She swallowed the lump forming in her throat. “I’m so mixed up right now. I don’t have a job or a car. The money I have won’t last long. Then what will I do? Look at me, Dave. I’m twenty-seven years old and I have nothing. I’m worthless.”

“Don’t talk like that.” Dave tucked a lock of her hair behind her ear. “I’m proud of you. It took a lot of courage to leave Rick the way you did. Give yourself

time to get settled and clear your head. You don't have to figure out the rest of your life today."

She nodded. Even now, she felt too ashamed to tell Dave why she'd really left Rick. He thought it was because Rick cheated on her. "It all happened so fast. You know me, I'm predictable. I make lists and plans. I don't do things on impulse."

"Then maybe it's time for a change. Make a fresh start and put the past behind you." Dave patted her shoulder.

"Yeah, I guess I have no choice, huh?" Dave was right. Now was the perfect time to begin a new life. She wouldn't miss her old life, anyway.

"And while you're here, try to get along with Curtis. He's welcome to stay as long as he wants—the same as you. Okay?"

The meaning of his words hit home. Dave had never questioned her immediate need to move in or asked how long she'd stay.

"Go talk to Curtis. He's a nice guy once you get to know him."

"Now? I'm not really in the mood to—"

“Go.” Dave nudged her toward the door. “I’m not asking you to fall in love with him, Sher, just be social. After all, you two are gonna be stuck with each other all summer.”

* * *

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kelli A. Wilkins is an award-winning author who has published more than 100 short stories, 19 romance novels, and 5 non-fiction books. Her romances span many genres and heat levels.

Beauty & the Bigfoot, a paranormal-comedy, was published in September 2017.

Kelli released ***Trust with Hearts***, a contemporary romance, in July 2017. Her third gay romance, ***Four Days with Jack***, was released in June 2017. Kelli's trilogy of erotic romance novellas, ***Midsummer Night's Delights***, ***Midwinter Night's Delights***, and ***Ultimate Night's Delights*** was published in spring 2017.

Loving a Wild Stranger was published in January 2017. This historical/pioneer romance is set in the wilds of the Michigan Territory and blends tender romance with adventure.

Kelli's third Medallion Press romance, ***Lies, Love & Redemption*** was released in September 2016. This spicy historical western is set on the Nebraska prairie in 1877.

Her writing book, ***You Can Write—Really! A Beginner's Guide to Writing Fiction*** is a fun and informative guide filled with writing exercises and helpful tips all authors can use.

Kelli posts on her Facebook author page:
<https://www.facebook.com/AuthorKelliWilkins> and
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