

Undone: A Novel (Will Trent)

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In this suspense masterpiece, Karin Slaughter weaves together the powerful human stories of three unforgettable characters from her New York Times bestselling novels *Faithless* and *Fractured*, who collide here for the first time in an electrifying race against unspeakable human evil.

When a tortured young woman enters the trauma center of an Atlanta hospital, Dr. Sara Linton is thrust into a desperate police investigation with Special Agent Will Trent and his partner, Faith Mitchell. Though guarding their own wounds and their own secrets, Sara, Will, and Faith find that they are all that stand between a madman and his next victim.

Karin Slaughter is the New York Times and #1 internationally bestselling author of numerous thrillers, including *Cop Town*, *Unseen*, *Criminal*, *Fallen*, *Broken*, *Undone*, *Fractured*, *Beyond Reach*, *Triptych*, *Faithless*, and the e-original short stories "Snatched" and "Busted." She is a native of Georgia.

From the Hardcover edition. Prologue

They had been married forty years to the day and Judith still felt like she didn't know everything about her husband. Forty years of cooking Henry's dinner, forty years of ironing his shirts, forty years of sleeping in his bed, and he was still a mystery. Maybe that was why she kept doing all these things for him with little or no complaint. There was a lot to be said for a man who, after forty years, still managed to hold your attention.

Judith rolled down the car window, letting in some of the cool, spring air. Downtown Atlanta was only thirty minutes away, but out here in Conyers, you could still find areas of undeveloped land, even some small farms. It was a quiet place, and Atlanta was just far enough away so that she could appreciate the peace. Still, Judith sighed as she caught a quick glimpse of the city's skyscrapers on the distant horizon, thinking, home.

She was surprised at the thought, that Atlanta was now a place she considered her home. Her life until recently had been suburban, even rural. She preferred the open spaces to the concrete sidewalks of the city, even while she admitted that it was nice living in so central a location that you could walk to the corner store or a little caf  if the mood struck you.

Days would pass without her even having to get into a car- the type of life she would have never dreamed of ten years ago. She could tell Henry felt the same. His shoulders bunched up around his ears with tight resolve as he navigated the Buick down a narrow country road. After decades of driving just about every highway and interstate in the country, he instinctively knew all the back routes, the doglegs and shortcuts.

Judith trusted him to get them home safely. She sat back in her seat, staring out the window, blurring her eyes so that the trees bordering the road seemed more like a thick forest. She made the trip to Conyers at least once a week, and every time she felt like she saw something new-a small house she'd never noticed, a bridge she'd bumped over many times but never paid attention to. Life was like that. You didn't realize what was passing you by until you slowed down a little bit to get a better look.

They'd just come from an anniversary party in their honor, thrown together by their son. Well, more likely thrown together by Tom's wife, who managed his life like an executive assistant, housekeeper, babysitter, cook and-presumably-concubine all rolled up into one. Tom had been a joyful surprise, his birth an event doctors had said would never come about. Judith had loved every part of him on first sight, accepted him as a gift that she would cherish with every bone in her body. She had done everything for him, and now that Tom was in his thirties, he still seemed to need an awful lot of taking care of. Perhaps Judith had been too conventional a wife, too subservient a mother, so that her son had grown into the sort of man who needed-expected-a wife to do everything for him. Judith certainly had not enslaved herself to Henry. They had married in 1969, a time when women could actually have interests other than cooking the perfect pot roast and discovering the best method to get stains out of the carpet. From the start, Judith had been determined to make her life as interesting as possible. She'd been a room mother at Tom's school. She'd volunteered at the local homeless shelter and helped start a recycling group in the neighborhood. When Tom was older, Judith took a job doing light bookkeeping for a local business and joined a running team through the church to train for marathons. This active lifestyle stood in stark contrast to that of Judith's own mother, a woman who toward the end of her life was so ravaged from raising nine children, so drained from the constant physical demands of being a farmer's wife, that some days she was too depressed to even speak.

Though, Judith had to admit, she had herself been a somewhat typical woman in those early years. Embarrassingly, she was one of those girls who had gone to college specifically to find a husband. She had grown up near Scranton, Pennsylvania, in a town so small it didn't merit a dot on the map. The only men available to her were farmers, and they were hardly interested in Judith. Judith could not blame them. The mirror told no lies. She was a bit too plump, a bit too bucktoothed, and a bit too much of everything else, to be the sort of woman Scranton men took for a wife. And then there was her father, a stern disciplinarian whom no sane man would seek out for a father-in-law, at least not in exchange for a bucktoothed, pearshaped girl who had no natural talent for farming.

The truth was that Judith had always been the odd one in the family, the one who didn't quite fit in. She read too much. She hated farmwork. Even as a young girl, she was not drawn to animals and did not want to be responsible for their care and feeding. None of her sisters and brothers had been sent away for higher education. There were two brothers who had dropped out of ninth grade, and an older sister who had married rather quickly and given birth to her first child seven months later. Not that anyone bothered to do the math. Enveloped in a constant state of denial, her mother had remarked to her dying day that her first grandchild had always been big-boned, even as an infant. Thankfully, Judith's father had seen the writing on the wall so far as his middle girl was concerned. There would be no marriage of convenience with any of the local boys, not least of all because none of them found her remotely convenient. Bible college, he decided, was not just Judith's last-but her only-chance. At the age of six, Judith had been struck in the eye by a flying piece of debris as she chased after the tractor. From that moment on, she'd always worn glasses. People assumed she was cerebral because of the glasses, when in fact the opposite was true. Yes, she loved to read, but her tastes ran more toward

trashy dime novel than literary. Still, the egghead label had stuck. What was it they used to say? "Men don't make passes at women who wear glasses." So, it was surprising-no, more like shocking-when on Judith's first day of college in her first class, the teaching assistant had winked at her.

She had thought something was in his eye, but there was no mistaking Henry Coldfield's intentions when, after class, he had pulled her aside and asked her if she'd like to go down to the drugstore and have a soda with him. The wink, apparently, was the beginning and end of his gregariousness. Henry was a very shy man in person; strange, considering he later became the top salesman for a liquor distribution company-a job he passionately despised even three years past retirement.

Judith supposed Henry's ability to blend had come from being the son of an Army colonel, moving around the country so often, never staying at one base more than a few years at a time. There was no passionate love at first sight-that came later. Initially, Judith had simply been attracted to the fact that Henry was attracted to her. It was a novelty for the pear from Scranton, but Judith had always been at the opposite spectrum of Marx's philosophy-Groucho, not Karl: She was more than willing to join any club that would have her as a member. Henry was a club unto himself. He was neither handsome nor ugly; forward nor reticent. With his neatly parted hair and flat accent, average would be the best way to describe him, which Judith later did in a letter to her older sister. Rosa's response had been something along the lines of, "Well, I suppose that's the best you can hope for." In her defense, Rosa was pregnant at the time with her third child while her second was still in diapers, but still, Judith had never forgiven her sister for the slight-not against herself, but against Henry. If Rosa failed to notice how special Henry was, it was because Judith was a poor writer; Henry too nuanced a man for mere words on a page. Perhaps it was all for the best. Rosa's sour observation had given Judith a reason to break from her family and embrace this winkingly introverted, mercurial stranger.

Henry's gregarious shyness was only the first of many dichotomies Judith had observed in her husband over the years. He was terrified of heights, but had earned his amateur pilot's license as a teenager. He sold alcohol but never imbibed. He was a homebody, but he spent most of his adult life traveling through the Northwest, then the Midwest, as promotions moved them around the country much like the Army had done when Henry was a child. His life, it seemed, was all about making himself do things he did not want to do. And yet, he often told Judith that her company was the one thing that he truly enjoyed.

Forty years, and so many surprises.

Sadly, Judith doubted her son held any such surprises for his spouse. While Tom was growing up, Henry was on the road three weeks out of every four, and his parenting came in spurts that didn't necessarily highlight his more compassionate side. Subsequently, Tom became everything his father had shown him during those growing years: strict, unbending, driven.

There was something else to it as well. Judith didn't know if it was because Henry saw his

sales job as a duty to his family rather than his passion, or because he hated being away from home so much, but it seemed that every interaction he had with their son held an underlying tension: Don't make the same mistakes I've made. Don't get trapped in a job you despise. Don't compromise your beliefs to put food on the table. The only positive thing he recommended to the boy was marrying a good woman. If only he had been more specific. If only he hadn't been so hard.

Why was it that men were such exacting parents to their male children? Judith guessed they wanted their sons to succeed in places they had not. In those early days, when Judith was first pregnant, the thought of a daughter had spread a rapid warmth through her body, followed by a searing cold. A young girl like Judith, out there in the world, defying her mother, defying the world. It gave her an understanding of Henry's desire that Tom do better, be better, have everything that he wanted and more.

Tom had certainly succeeded at his job, though his mouse of a wife was a disappointment. Every time Judith came face-to-face with her daughter-in-law, she itched to tell the woman to stand up straight, speak up and, for the love of God, grow a backbone. One of the volunteers at the church had said the other week that men married their mothers. Judith hadn't argued with the woman, but she'd defy anyone to find a lick of similarity she shared with her son's wife.

Except for the desire to spend time with her grandchildren, Judith could never see her daughter-in-law again and be perfectly happy. The grandchildren were the sole reason they had moved to Atlanta, after all. She and Henry had uprooted their retirement life in Arizona and moved almost two thousand miles to this hot city with its smog alerts and gang killings just so they could be close to two of the most spoiled and ungrateful little things this side of the Appalachia.

Judith glanced at Henry as he tapped his fingers on the steering wheel, humming tunelessly as he drove. They never talked about their grandchildren except in glowing terms, possibly because a fit of honesty might reveal that they didn't much like them—and then where would they be? Their lives turned upside down for two small children who were on gluten-free diets, strictly regimented naptimes and tightly scheduled playdates, but only with "like-minded children who shared the same goals."

So far as Judith could see, the only goal her grandchildren had was to be the center of attention. She imagined you couldn't sneeze without finding a like-minded, self-centered child, but according to her daughter-in-law, it was an almost impossible task. Wasn't that the whole point of youth, to be self-centered? And wasn't it the job of the parent to drill that out of you? Certainly, it was clear to all involved that it wasn't the job of the grandparents.

When little Mark had spilled his unpasteurized juice on Henry's slacks and Lilly had eaten so many of the Hershey's Kisses she'd found in Judith's purse that she'd reminded Judith of a homeless woman at the shelter last month who was tweaking so badly on methamphetamines that she'd wet herself, Henry and Judith had merely smiled-chuckled.

even-as if these were merely wonderful little quirks that the children would soon grow out of.

Soon was not coming soon enough, however, and now that they'd reached the ages of seven and nine, Judith was starting to lose faith that one day, her grandchildren would turn into polite and loving young adults who did not feel the urge to constantly interrupt adult conversation and run around the house screaming at such high decibels that animals two counties over started howling. Judith's only consolation was that Tom took them to church every Sunday. She of course wanted her grandchildren exposed to a life in Christ, but more importantly, she wanted them to learn the lessons taught in Sunday School. Honor thy mother and father. Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Don't think you're going to waste your life, drop out of school and move in with Grandma and Grandpa any time soon. "Hey!" Henry barked as a car in the oncoming lane shot past them so close that the Buick actually shook on its tires. "Kids," he grumbled, gripping the wheel tightly in his hands.

The closer he got to seventy, the more Henry seemed to embrace the role of cranky old man. Sometimes, this was endearing. Other times, Judith wondered how long it would be before he started shaking his fist in the air, blaming all the ills of the world on "kids." The age of these kids seemed to range anywhere from four to forty, and his irritation ticked up exponentially when he caught them doing something that he used to do himself, but now could no longer enjoy. Judith dreaded the day they took away his pilot's license, something that might come sooner rather than later, considering that his last checkup at the cardiologist had shown some irregularities. ...

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ⓧ ⓧ ⓧ ⓧ ⓧ . Would this ap- peal , which she had written with her heart's blood , go for nothing , as all the prayers and tears ... nothing undone to attract attention to her cause , she wrote letters and ordered copies of her novel sent to men of ..."