

Tour de Force

Canadian author outdoes himself

Suspended Sentences

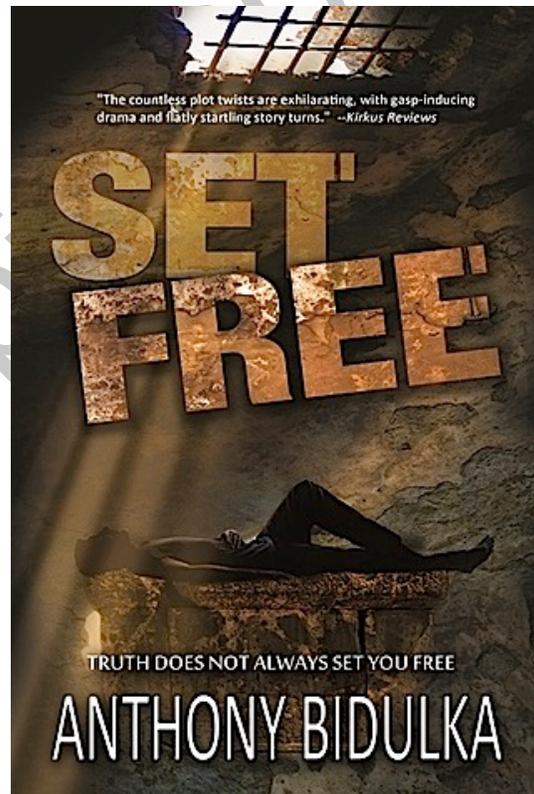
by Jim Napier

The opening sentence gets the reader's immediate attention: "*I would have packed less if I knew I was going to die.*"

Renowned author Jasper Wills is abducted within minutes of arriving at Menara airport outside the city of Marrakech. Assuming that the taxi driver would take him to his hotel, he soon finds himself locked in the cab and threatened with a gun. Beaten into unconsciousness, he awakens to discover that he's bound and gagged and alone in a darkened room. Jasper uses the time to reflect on recent events in his life: his marriage to Jenn, and the birth of their daughter Michelle years earlier — and then, barely thirteen years later, their own daughter's kidnapping.

The demand had been for ten million dollars, far more than the couple could raise. The FBI had been called in and asked them to use the media to appeal to the kidnappers, even offering to supply the money. But in the end, although Jasper and his wife had complied with the kidnappers' demands, the briefcase containing the ransom was never picked up, and their daughter never came home. The couple's marriage had not survived the ordeal: shortly

before his trip to Marrakech Jenn tells him that she won't be there when he returns.



As he lies in the isolated room contemplating his fate, Jasper struggles to make sense of his own abduction. Who took him, and why? Was it connected to Jenn's disappearance? Where was he? Just as he begins to puzzle out his location he is moved, his new prison some distance away in the Atlas Mountains.

The weeks pass, and Jasper Wills grows more and more desperate for even the smallest amenities of life: a toothbrush, a belt to hold up his pants as he withers away. Then he is visited by a mysterious woman who speaks no English. His crusts of stale bread are replaced by delicacies, honey, a small *tagine* consisting of lamb, apricot and vegetables, even a tiny serving of couscous — all unbelievable luxuries that defy any sort of rational understanding: why starve him to the point of extinction, then reward him with such delights? What is their purpose? The scene is surreal, and before it is ended readers will be taken on a Byzantine journey that will

test their own assumptions, their own take on the world. But more — much more — is to come.

Poignant, ingeniously plotted, and exquisitely told, *Set Free* will keep you on the edge of your seat until you turn the final page. Bidulka is an accomplished writer, with nearly a dozen well-received novels to his credit; but *Set Free* is heads and shoulders above the rest. At the risk of jinxing this talented writer, his latest work could very well be his breakout novel. Pass on it at your own risk.

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