

Hope Matters

The young woman trolls streets littered with trash and seedy people, scanning for a buyer. You watch intently as she bends down to talk to a man who pulled his car up to the curb where she's waiting. You wonder how she got there and how she can do what she does. Suddenly, she notices you watching her. All she wants is to be like you because she's long since forgotten who she is.

She barely resembles a real person. She's convinced that there is no way out and that she faces a bleak future. She can't imagine anyone wanting to help her, and she's too confused and ashamed to help herself. She is, after all, a prostitute. Just look beyond the skimpy, tattered clothes and worn-out, high-heeled shoes, and you'll recognize a person no different than you are. She was taken from her family and forced to sell her body.

Now do you view her differently? You know you should help her because underneath all the makeup and shabby clothing, there is an unwilling participant who is just looking for someone to give her a small sign of hope.

Do something, because hope matters.

~Paige Dearth

The First Twelve Hours of Captivity

Eleven-year-old Maggie threw up when the man behind the camera demanded that she remove her jeans. “What the fuck,” Vic, the photographer, mumbled as he walked over and pushed her down on the bed in the makeshift studio. Then he ripped her jeans off with so much force that it felt as though a layer of her skin came off with the denim. Vic threw a towel at her. “Now wipe up that slop and take your fucking shirt off,” he ordered.

Maggie was sobbing; she was stricken with an overwhelming sensation she’d never felt before, a feeling that she was going to die. She had no control over her emotions as she tried not to piss off the man with the camera any more than she already had. She removed her T-shirt slowly. “Good,” Vic huffed. “Now lie down on the bed and take your underwear off.”

Maggie shook her head. “I don’t want to do that. Please don’t make me do that, mister.” Her small voice quivered.

“That’s it,” Vic screamed. “John William, get the fuck over here and handle this. I don’t have all day for one kid. We have a fuckin’ business to run, here.”

John William thudded over to the bed where Maggie sat huddled, trying to cover her body, and he backhanded her across the face. Blood dribbled down her split lip and into her mouth, its coppery taste threatening to excite her gag reflex again. Before she could regain her senses, he pulled her panties off. Maggie pulled her knees up to her chin and wrapped her arms tightly around her legs as she sat naked on the bed with the two strange men watching her.

She was alone and terrified. All of her senses were heightened by the evil surrounding her. She didn’t know what they were going to do to her. Her parents had warned that no one should ever touch her private parts. But here, in this crumbling cement room, she had no choice. Maggie had an overwhelming feeling that the two men were going to do things to her that they shouldn’t, and this intensified the vulnerable feeling that gnawed at her gut, jeopardizing her ability to follow their instructions.

Vic looked at Maggie, his face devoid of any kindness. “I’m going to tell you this one time and one time only. I want you to spread your legs apart so I can take some pictures. Just drop your knees to your sides. Do you understand?”

Maggie nodded, not wanting to be hit again. Once Vic was back behind the camera, he looked over at her. “OK, spread your legs like I told you to.”

Maggie dropped her knees to the sides, and he began to snap pictures. “Now, I want you to reach down and touch yourself.”

Maggie froze, not knowing what to do. John William stepped in, grabbed her hand, and placed it roughly between her legs. “That’s it. Put your fingers inside,” Vic coaxed her.

Inside where? Maggie wondered, feeling filthy and ruined. Not knowing what she was supposed to do, she remained motionless. Vic strode over briskly, grabbed her hand, and shoved her fingers inside of her. Fear mixed with adrenaline coursed through her body—she thought they had broken her. She had no idea there was a hole between her legs before that moment. They had just started sex education at school, but nothing could have prepared her for the horrible acts she would be expected to perform to her body.

Vic turned to John William. “The next time you bring a new kid in here, make sure they’re ready for me. You understand?” he demanded.

John William nodded and glared heartlessly at Maggie. The look was so demonic that it was almost blinding. She shrank away from him, and a deeper level of fear ran uncontrollably through her body, seizing her muscles, paralyzing her.

After Vic took several more pictures, he told her to put on her clothes and leave. As Maggie quickly dressed, she wondered if they had gotten what they wanted and would take her back to the mall now. She was certain that her mother was still at the mall, searching for her. Maggie decided that when the two men let her go home, she would never tell anyone about the pictures they’d taken. Maggie feared that she would be in trouble if her parents found out what she had done.

However, ten minutes later, John William pulled Maggie into her cell and pushed her toward a cot. When he reached the doorway, he turned. “You have a lot to learn. I suggest you pay attention and do what we tell you to do. I’m going to cut you a break since it’s your first night, but if you ever embarrass me like that again, I’ll bash your brains in.”

Maggie’s hope of going home quickly vanished as his words bounced inside her head. *Since it’s your first night.* She instantly understood that they weren’t finished with her yet. Her heart beat faster as she tried desperately to hang on to the hope that they would let her go.

He raised his voice. “You are to obey everything that you are told to do! If you weren’t worth so much money, I’d fuck the shit out of you right now.”

Maggie was shaking. She didn’t know exactly what he was talking about, but she knew enough to understand that John William wanted to do bad things to her, dirty things. She clung to the cold block wall of the cell, unable to wrap her mind around what was happening to her.

“Take off all of your clothes,” John William instructed.

Maggie did as she was told quickly this time.

He looked at her with lust. “Now bring me your clothes.”

She quickly scooped them up and carried them to him. John William grabbed them from her arms.

“For causing such a scene tonight, you can sleep naked. So you can get used to it, you little whore,” John William taunted.

After John William left her and locked the heavy door behind him, Maggie sat on the dirty cot. She wept from the very depth of her soul. The unrelenting fear was suffocating and inescapable. This had been the hardest day of her young life. She had only been missing for twelve hours, but it felt like a year to eleven-year-old Maggie.

She cried herself to sleep that night, thinking of her family, and when she woke the next day, her nightmare continued.

One Day Prior: The Capture

Maggie was only thirty feet from the line of people at the pizza counter in the food court inside the Plymouth Meeting Mall. As she walked by the large glass doors that opened to the parking lot, she saw two teenage girls standing just outside the entrance. They were talking to a man with a puppy. She watched as the girls took turns holding the dog. Then, as they passed Maggie on their way into the mall, she heard them talking about how adorable the puppy was. “Wasn’t that man nice?” one of the girls said. “I wish my dad felt that way about dogs and would let me get a puppy.”

Maggie looked out the glass doors at the man holding the puppy; he turned the dog in her direction and lifted a paw, as if to wave at Maggie. She stood glued to the glass door, smiling at the tiny pile of fur in the man’s arms. She opened the glass door just a couple of inches. “He’s so cute. What’s his name?” Maggie asked.

“I just got him today, and I haven’t named him yet. I’m taking ideas, though. What do you think I should call him?” John William asked sweetly.

“I don’t know,” Maggie said shyly, not able to take her eyes off the fluffy mound of fur.

“Would you like to hold him?” John William offered.

“I would, but I really shouldn’t. I can’t leave the mall,” she explained.

“You’re not leaving the mall. I’m standing five feet away from the door. What’s the difference whether you’re standing five feet inside or outside of the door? Besides, I’m not allowed to bring him inside,” John William said.

Just then, the puppy gave a small bark at Maggie.

“See, he likes you. I think he wants you to hold him,” John William told her.

Maggie looked around and then over her shoulder across the food court at McDonald’s. She saw her mother and brother in a long line waiting to place their order. Deciding they’d be quite a while, she agreed.

“OK, but just for a minute. If my mom finds out I went outside, she’ll ground me for sure,” Maggie explained.

She stood next to John William, and he handed her the puppy. It immediately started to lick her face.

“See, he loves you already. What’s your name?” he asked.

“Maggie. He’s the cutest puppy ever.” She kissed the top of the dog’s head and handed him back to John William. “I have to go back in. Thanks for letting me hold him,” she said.

John William took the puppy from her and set him on the ground. To his delight, the dog did exactly what he'd hoped. It ran off toward the parking lot.

"Oh my God," John William exclaimed, pretending to be worried. "He's gonna get killed by a car. Please help me catch him!" he yelled to Maggie as he ran in the direction of the dog.

Without thinking it through, Maggie darted off to help rescue the puppy. She was running behind John William when he turned. "You run down that lane, and I'll meet you at the far end. That way, he can't get away," he rasped.

Maggie ran between two cars and down the lane to the very end, where she stood behind a red van. When John William met her, he was carrying the puppy. "Thanks for your help. He could have been killed," he said and handed the puppy to her.

She took him into her arms again. "Pup, you could've been killed. You have to be more careful," she cooed.

"This is my van," John William told her as he opened the back door.

Maggie looked inside and saw a small dog crate.

"Why don't you put him in the crate for me, and I'll get his bowl from the front seat. I want to give him some water. He must be thirsty from all that running around," he said with a smile.

Maggie watched as John William started toward the front of his van. Only then did she climb in to put the puppy in the crate, but before she made it that far, she was wrapped in an overpowering embrace. She panicked; the desire to flee surged through her body.

John William shoved her toward the crate, and she quickly scurried to find her footing. He was right next to her when he yanked a rag doused in chloroform from a small bucket on the floor of the van. He grabbed her around the waist and put the rag over her mouth and nose. She was unconscious in seconds.

When Maggie woke up, she was lying in the back of the van, hog-tied and gagged. Her head was pounding and the motion of the van churned the nausea that swirled in her belly. As her vision began to clear, she saw a young boy lying next to her, bound and gagged in the same way. The boy was much younger than she was—five or six, she guessed. He lay lifelessly, and she hoped he wasn't dead.

Maggie started to weep. She thought about how stupid she was to follow the man outside. Her mother had warned specifically about adults using pets to lure children in so they could steal them.

Then she thought about her mother. *Why had she insisted that she was old enough to get pizza by herself?* Her mom had said no at first, but Maggie had begged, “Come on, Mom. I’m not a baby. I’m eleven years old. I can walk to the other side of the food court by myself.”

Lorraine, Maggie’s mother, wanted to show her daughter that she trusted her and finally agreed. When Maggie headed to the pizza line, her mother took her younger brother, Keith, to McDonald’s for a happy meal.

Maggie wanted the other kids at the food court to think she was cool. The fifth-grade girls from her class, who always left Maggie out, were celebrating a birthday with a pizza party at the food court. She wanted to show them that she had independence and was too good to join their stupid little group.

Still, in the back of the van with a man she didn’t know, she tried to keep herself calm. The little boy lying next to her finally woke up. He looked at her pleadingly, but there was nothing she could do to help. She tried to keep her eyes from revealing her own fear, but it was a wasted effort.

Suddenly, the van came to a stop, and the back doors opened. John William reached in and clamped his large hand on one of Maggie’s ankles. Then he reached down with a knife and cut the thick rope that kept her legs and arms tied together. He pulled her out of the van and into a field, putting one of her arms behind her back. She felt the handcuffs fasten on her right wrist and then her left. The cold steel of the cuff cut into her flesh, and she looked at John William for mercy.

Ignoring her, John William did the same to the small boy, who was crying and squirming in an attempt to escape. John William slapped the boy, and after the child fell to the ground, he put his dirty white sneaker on the child’s back while he handcuffed him.

Maggie looked around frantically for someone who could help them. Since it was dark outside, she knew they had been in the van for a long time. John William took each of them by the arm and dragged them down a dirt path with high grass on either side. Maggie could see a stark, stone building ahead. The building was as frightening as the man who had taken her from the mall. It stood like an abandoned castle against the moonlit night sky.

Maggie's New Home

John William led the children through a heavy steel door and down a hall with jail cells on either side. It was obvious that no one else was there. "Where are we?" Maggie squeaked through the gag that was tied at the back of her head.

"Silence," John William demanded.

Her mind raced as they walked through the decrepit prison. *Oh my God, how will I find my way home?* After he took them through a block of cells, he stopped to grab a flashlight from a stool next to a small steel door. John William pulled the two children along, down two long flights of rusted metal stairs, deeper into the bowels of the building.

Finally, they were walking down a dark, narrow hall. The flashlight threw off a spooky yellow haze, and Maggie knew that her abductor had delivered them to hell. On either side of them were tiny cells. Mounds of dirt poured into the hallway from some of the cells, where the building's foundation had given way to the force of the earth pressing in from the outside.

Unlike the cells two floors above them, these cells had solid steel doors with small, rectangular openings in the middle. John William stopped midway down the hall and took them both into one of the cells. He made the little boy lie down on the cot. Then he removed his gag and handcuffs. "Don't you move," he ordered.

Shutting the door behind them, he led Maggie to the cell directly across the hall. After her gag and handcuffs were removed, he abruptly left. Maggie began to pray that whatever was happening to them would end quickly. That someone would come and rescue them.

Maggie heard the small child whimpering. Then she heard John William ask the child, "Why were you such a bad little boy?"

"I not bad," the child insisted.

Maggie heard the first couple of slaps and the child begging John William to stop. "You will not be disobedient to me."

Maggie heard the sound of whipping as John William's belt flew across the boy's back. The boy screamed as each lash landed, and then suddenly, he went silent. Maggie paced in her small dark cell. She willed the child to make a sound so she would know he was still alive. Then the door to her cell was unlocked and John William stood before her like a giant. He stared down at her with an icy expression. "Why were you such a bad little girl?"

Maggie's survival instincts kicked in. Having heard what John William had just done to the boy, she whimpered, "Because I was jealous of the other girls in the mall. I'm sorry. I won't do it again."

John William paused and sized her up. "Good girl. Now are you willing to accept your punishment?"

“Yes,” she muttered, beginning to cry. “But I swear I’ll be a good girl.”

For the first time, John William smiled. His crooked, yellow-brownish teeth were twisted and looked sinister. “OK then.”

He sat on her cot and told her to come over to him. She stood next to him shaking, her arms crossed over her chest. He pulled her down across his lap and spanked her with his open hand. After three hard whacks on the ass, he forced her to her feet again. “Tonight, you go to bed without dinner.”

“OK,” Maggie responded, humiliated from the spanking. Maggie had learned her first lesson: whatever happened, she always had to agree with John William if she wanted to live to see her family again.

Who's There?

After Maggie heard John William's footsteps fade away, she called out across the small hall, "Little boy? Are you OK?"

When there was no response, she called out a little louder, "Little boy? Can you hear me?"

Maggie jumped when she heard a girl's voice from the cell to her left. "Shut up before we all get punished, you idiot!" the angry voice rattled.

Maggie was shocked into silence at the realization that someone else was down there with them. She was relieved to know they weren't alone. Then her fear soared as she wondered how long the girl had been there. "Don't be mean," she heard an older girl say in a calm voice. "They just got here."

"Who's there?" Maggie asked in a trembling voice.

It was the older girl who spoke. "There are several of us here. My name is Cali. I'm the oldest. I'm in the cell to your right. Shana is on the other side of you, and Max is next to the little boy who came in with you."

"Why are we here?" Maggie asked with desperation. "I just want to go home."

"We all want to get out of here, sweetheart. You need to settle down. Now, what's your name?" Cali asked in a soothing voice, trying to calm her.

"Maggie. That guy took me from the mall," she said sadly.

Cali gathered herself together. "The guy's name is John William. That's what we have to call him. We were all taken from different places. Everyone is gonna to be fine. You have to stay calm, though, and just do what he says. OK?"

"But what's he going to do to me?" Maggie asked.

Cali wanted to prepare the girl, although she knew that nothing could prepare someone for the horrors that they lived. "John William will come back tonight and take you upstairs to have some pictures taken. Maggie, the pictures will make you feel very uncomfortable, but try to remember that if you don't listen, they'll hurt you, OK?"

"Uh-huh," Maggie muttered, fearful of what was to come. Then she felt around in the dark until she found the cot with the dusty, worn mattress. She climbed onto it and rolled into a fetal position. She lay awake for several hours, praying that her mom and dad would come to rescue her.

Only when she fell asleep that night did she escape her suffocating fear. It was hours later when the sound of a cell door being unlocked awakened her. She scrambled to her feet to look out the small opening in her door. She quivered as she watched John William pull Shana across the front of her cell. Shana was crying, but went along with

him without much resistance. She heard Cali tell her, “It’s OK, Shana. You’ll be all right. Just do whatever they want you to.”

When the hall went black again, Maggie spoke. “Cali, what’s going to happen to Shana? Who are *they*?”

Cali thought before she spoke. If she wanted the girl to live, she’d have to tell her what was happening, “How old are you, Maggie?”

“I’m eleven,” Maggie muttered.

“Maggie, these people want to do things with you that only grown-ups should do with each other. Do you know what sex is?” Cali asked, wishing she could hold the scared girl.

Maggie’s head started to spin. The only thing she knew about sex was that it was something that old people did. She knew it involved getting naked. She had seen a show on cable TV in which a couple was lying in a bed, and they looked like they didn’t have any clothes on. Her father had walked into the room and shut off the television when he saw what she was watching.

“I don’t know exactly what it is. I know that people take their clothes off and get in bed together,” she responded, her stomach clamping down into a tight knot.

“Yes, Maggie. They get naked in bed together. When they come for you tonight, just do what they ask. Tomorrow, I’ll explain things to you, OK?” Cali said, dreading the conversation she would have with her in the morning.

Maggie's First Full Day

In the morning, she stayed perfectly still on her cot. From within the dark and damp walls of the prison cell, she had no sense of time; she didn't know whether it was night or day. Her thoughts wandered to the day prior—the day she'd made the biggest mistake of her life.

Maggie was still lost in morbid thoughts of the pictures they'd taken of her just hours before. A light went on in her cell, and she bolted upright on her cot. She looked up at the round, globe fixture on the ceiling that was protected by a steel cage. It cast a dim light over the tiny cell. She looked around. The cell was barren except for the cot and a toilet. The toilet looked like a large, white tree stump with a hole in the center. She walked to the toilet and squatted over the hole. She peed quickly; afraid something gruesome would come out of the black hole in the center and suck her down into it.

Then the cell door opened, and John William stood staring down at her. In the dim light, she was finally able to get a good look at him. Her eyes slowly wandered to his neck and lingered on his Adam's apple, which protruded from his throat as if a hard-boiled egg was caught there. He had a very long, narrow face, and his black eyes sat too closely together. Limp, shoulder-length, greasy, blond hair hung around his skull like yarn, making him look as crazy as he was. He was over six feet tall, and his shoulders seemed permanently hunched. His long arms stopped just above his knees, and his hands were as big as Frisbees. He appeared to be dim-witted and creepy—the type of man who gave grown women the heebie-jeebies. Maggie realized that she'd been so focused on the puppy that she hadn't really looked at John William, the most horrid man she'd ever seen.

John William threw Maggie's clothes at her. "Get dressed fast. It's time for breakfast," he stated.

John William watched as the beautiful Maggie studied him. He saw the look of revulsion that he had grown accustomed to seeing on the faces of girls and women, including his own mother.

Maggie's expression brought back memories of his childhood. John William's parents never allowed him to play with the neighborhood children, repeatedly telling him, "The other kids hate you. They make fun of you because you look like a goon. You are the ugliest person who ever lived. You get your nasty looks from your grandfather."

When John William was nine, his parents punished him for misbehaving by forcing him to remove all of his clothes and tying him to a metal chair that they kept in a small closet under the stairs in their home. They would leave him there for hours.

Because of the verbal and physical abuse his parents subjected him to, John William was deeply depressed at a young age. He was an outcast among his peers and, by middle school, he was a love-starved, confused boy who was the focus of his peers' ridicule.

At school, children teased him mercilessly, but he never dared to fight back, fearing that his parents would tie him to the chair in the closet. As the years passed, he grew increasingly resentful toward his parents and the other kids at his school, especially the girls.

After being widely rejected by the various cliques in high school, John William began spending his free time alone in seedy areas of Philadelphia, where he learned that people who were feared got respect. When John William met a lunatic who convinced him to kidnap a nineteen-year-old girl, he got a taste of power, and for the first time in his life, he felt like he fit in. The children he kidnapped needed him for basic survival, and that purpose in life was validating. He had finally found a way to get the respect that he deserved.

In the narrow hallway between the cells, also illuminated by dim overhead light, Maggie looked around at the children who had gathered. They all appeared to be like robots. They were despondent, as if someone had stolen their souls. The dark circles under their bloodshot eyes revealed that pain and despair were the overarching themes among them. Maggie wondered how they all got there, and she hoped it wouldn't be long before they could all go home.

Maggie waited with anticipation as John William opened the cell of the young boy who had been brought there with her. The child staggered into the hallway, saw Maggie, and threw his arms around her legs. She bent and picked him up, holding him tightly as he put his head on her shoulder and began to cry softly.

"Let's go," John William instructed.

The group walked down the hall in silence to another steel door, which John William opened. Inside was a long room containing a large metal picnic table and benches. Each child took a seat. Cali motioned for Maggie to sit next to her, and Maggie slid in beside her, still holding the small boy tightly.

"Now listen," Cali whispered. "It's important that you pay attention to what he tells you to do. After we're done eating, he will take us to the showers upstairs. We all shower together so it's no big deal."

Maggie looked over at the teenage boy, Max. He nodded to acknowledge her. She looked back at Cali, her eyes filling with tears.

"Look, Maggie, none of us care that we see each other naked, OK? We are all in the same boat here, and the more you resist what they want from you, the worse you'll make it for all of us. You'll get used to it, I promise."

"But I don't want to get used to it. I can't stay here. I want to go home," Maggie said, stating the obvious. She concentrated on her breathing, not wanting the other kids to think she was a baby. "How old are you guys?" she finally managed to ask.

Cali answered for all of them, "Max is fifteen, Shana is twelve, and I'm seventeen."

Then Maggie asked the question that had been stuck in her throat since they spoke from their cells the night before. “How long have all of you been here?”

“Too fuckin’ long!” Shana blurted.

Max gave Shana a scalding look. “Five years,” Max offered.

Shana looked Maggie over. “Three years.”

Finally, Cali spoke. “I was thirteen when they brought me here.”

As Maggie did the math in her head, a small gurgling sound escaped her lips. Cali quickly put her arm around her. “You have to be quiet. John William gets really mad when any of us cry.”

“Yeah, he’ll let you cry when you’re with the clients upstairs. He says they like to see us scared. But when we’re down here, he gets really pissed. So if you’re gonna cry, do it without making any noise,” Shana offered.

Maggie looked down at the small boy in her lap. “What’s your name?” she asked with as much courage as possible.

The blond, blue-eyed child looked up at her. “Seth.”

“Seth, my name is Maggie.”

“Aggie!” the young boy managed with a big grin.

“Do you know how old you are, Seth?”

Seth held up four chubby fingers.

“Wow, four years old. You’re a big boy.”

Just then, John William came back into the room. He motioned for Cali to come over to where he was standing. Maggie watched as he slid his hand over her breast. He turned and took the padlock off the large cupboard standing against the far wall. Cali quickly pulled plates and spoons from inside and rushed back to the table, where she gave the children one of each.

Cali raced back to where John William was standing and stood before him. The other children watched as John William put his hand on her ass, pulled her to him forcefully, and kissed her with an open mouth. Shana and Max had both lowered their heads, but Maggie watched, unable to rip her eyes away. She was mortified at what he was doing to her. It was easy to see that Cali was scared of him, and as he groped the teenager, he looked over at Maggie, licked his lips, and pointed at her.

Maggie peed herself as fright rocked her to the core. John William looked at her wet pants and started to laugh. He loved the power and control he had over the little rodents. It made him feel important. “You’re pathetic, girl!” he said, pushing Cali to the side.

He walked over to Maggie, pulled Seth from her arms, and pounded him down on the bench next to her. “Stand up and take those pissed jeans off,” he said angrily.

Maggie hesitated for a moment. John William grabbed her arm and picked her up off the bench. “Do it!”

Maggie quickly took her jeans off. He smiled. “Underwear too.”

Maggie stood naked from the waist down with all of the other children watching her. “Now, I want you to clean this mess up. You’ll have to stay like that until your clothes dry. Look everyone, look at the baby who pissed her pants,” John William chanted.

The other kids looked on, just as they were told to do. They had all been there. They all knew what she was going through. They had surrendered themselves completely in order to survive. It was humiliating, but it was necessary.

After Maggie cleaned up the urine with her jeans, she sat down on the bench. The cold metal against her skin made her squirm. The others watched her as John William and Cali left the room. Max wished he could do something to protect all of them. He was small and thin for fifteen, no match for John William. He leaned toward the center of the table so Maggie could hear him whisper. “Look, Maggie. It’ll be all right. You can’t let that rotten motherfucker get to you. He’s going to try to wear you down. All he wants is for you to be afraid of him. It makes him feel dominant. But remember that he’s just a big asshole. You need to make him think you’re afraid of him. That way, he won’t bust your shoes as much. If he thinks you ain’t scared, he’ll fuck with you until he knows you are scared. You get it?”

Maggie nodded. She didn’t have to pretend to be afraid of John William; she was petrified of him already. She looked at Cali, her eyes pleading. “I don’t wanna be here. I wanna go home. Maybe if we all stick together, we can find a way out of here.”

“None of us want to be here, Maggie. Maybe you’re right. Maybe someday we’ll find a way out,” Max lied in an attempt to comfort her.

At that moment, Cali and John William came back carrying a large pot of oatmeal. Cali served the oatmeal, and John William gave each of them a small glass of water. “Eat up,” he told the children. “Then it’s time for showers.”

The children ate their breakfast in silence. Maggie was too hungry to realize that the lumpy, lukewarm oatmeal was tasteless. As she mindlessly ate the slop in front of her, Maggie prayed that her parents would come that day and put an end to her nightmare.

The shower room was completely open, providing no privacy. Moldy shower heads on one wall spit out small streams of water. Maggie followed the older kids, keeping her eyes glued to the floor. She helped Seth get undressed and washed his hair for him. The others were like soldiers. To them, it was just a way of life. They had been doing it for so long that it didn't matter anymore. They seemed not to notice that their circumstances were hopeless.

After the children showered, John William took them back to their cells. This time, he left all of their doors open. It was now Cali's job to talk to each of them and get them ready for their clients. Shana and Max knew what to expect, but when it came to satisfying the clients, each of them still needed some coaxing. She wanted them back in one piece, and she had assured John William that Maggie would be ready.

Cali walked into Maggie's cell, where she was lying on her cot with Seth. "Hey, Maggie, I want to talk to you about tonight."

"Why? What's tonight?" Maggie asked, already dreading the answer.

"They're going to bring us all upstairs, and people are going to look at us. The thing is, we'll all be naked. There's nothing to worry about, though. No one is going to hurt you. The clients just look at us."

Maggie felt like she had swallowed a golf ball as terror moved from her stomach into her chest and settled in her throat. She knew there was nothing she could do to fight back. She threw herself into Cali's arms and started to cry. Her chest heaved as she pleaded with the teenager to tell John William that she couldn't do what he wanted her to do. Cali stroked Maggie's hair. "That isn't an option, baby. This is what you have to do if you don't want them to beat you and do awful things to you."

"What about Seth?" Maggie asked, hoping she could stay in her cell and babysit him while the others went upstairs.

"Seth will stay down here while we are upstairs," Cali told her matter-of-factly.

"But he's, he's just a baby," Maggie argued.

"I'm not a baby," Seth grunted. "I go to the bafroom in the potty."

Maggie and Cali ignored his protests.

"Just be ready, Maggie. Please. It will be easier for you if you're ready to do whatever they want. We'll all be together. That has to mean something, right?" Cali asked, trying to make the best out of a dreadful situation.

Maggie nodded and lay down on the cot, pulling Seth snugly against her body. She thought about her mother and father. They were probably going crazy looking for her. She was sure her little brother, Keith, missed her. He was the same age as Seth and always wanted Maggie to play with him. The two of them loved spending time

together. Thinking about Keith made her feel better. She wondered who would read to him until she got home. Then Maggie leaned into Seth's ear and whispered, "The two of us are going to be OK. Don't worry. I'll find a way to get us out of here. We just have to be brave."

If only Maggie felt brave.

Later that evening, all of the children except Seth were taken upstairs to a darkened room. There was a four-poster bed in the middle of the room. The bed looked ominous with black sheets and large, overstuffed, dreary-gray pillows. John William led the children to a corner and told them to undress. After Maggie removed her clothes, she stood nervously, wanting nothing more than to vanish. Another man in a leather mask and tight black underwear walked into the room. He ordered all of them to stand in front of the bed. Like little androids, they lined up, oldest to youngest. The man in the leather mask walked over to the door and opened it.

Twelve people—eight men and four women—entered the room. They stood and stared at the children, a few of them smiling as if they were looking at their Thanksgiving dinner.

Suddenly, music began to play. At a nod from the creepy masked man, Cali and Max moved around to the side of the bed and got on top. They began to kiss while Maggie and Shana stood at the side of the bed and watched. Maggie's eyes bulged out of their sockets when she saw how Max was touching Cali. He was putting his hands on her boobs and rubbing between her legs. Then Cali pushed Max down on the bed and put his penis into her mouth. Maggie was repulsed at the sight of what Cali was doing to Max.

After several minutes, Cali and Max stopped what they were doing. Getting off the bed, they led Maggie and Shana to the foot of the bed, where they stood in a line again. The strangers walked by them, looking them over, getting a better look at their faces. Each of them paused to take in the beauty that Maggie had to offer, and a few of them leaned in to sniff her hair. After the strangers left the room, the kids dressed, and John William led them back to their cells.

Chapter One

Maggie spent the next twenty-four hours alone in her cell, which was part of the break-in period. This was when the abductors used isolation, fear, humiliation, and physical punishment to make their victims submissive. Alone with nothing but her own thoughts, Maggie contemplated what was to come next. *How could she get away? Would her parents ever find her? What else would John William make her do?* Remorse crushed in on her as she recalled the events at the mall that led to her capture. As the hours of loneliness wore on, she tried to remember happy times with her family, but her mind always drifted back to her new reality.

The next night, John William took the children upstairs one at a time. Maggie sat on the edge of her cot. Hours passed as she waited for John William to come and get her. When she heard the door of her cell unlock, she had to fight back the scream of terror that was lodged in her chest.

John William took Maggie to a different room this time. When she stepped inside, there was a single bed shoved against the wall. She was told to sit on the bed. A few minutes later, a tall man walked into the room. He wore pleated, brown pants; a white, button-down shirt; and suspenders. He walked over to the side of the bed and smiled down at Maggie. “Hi, sweetie. Daddy’s home. Now, be a good little girl and take your clothes off. Do it nice and slow, the way Daddy likes it.”

Maggie’s limbs went limp, but she remembered what Cali had told her about getting beaten. Tears dribbled down her cheeks as she removed all of her clothes very slowly. He had her lie on the bed while he stood and looked at her for a while. Then he asked, “Were you a good girl today?”

Maggie nodded at him vigorously.

“I asked, were you a good girl today. When Daddy asks you a question, he expects to hear an answer,” he said, becoming odder by the moment.

“Yes, I was a good girl today.” Maggie’s voice cracked.

“Well, Mommy said you were very naughty. She said that you kicked the neighbor’s dog and, as much as I hate to do it, you know that Daddy has to punish you for it. Right?”

Maggie pleaded, “Please don’t punish me. I swear I won’t be bad again. Please.”

“It’s too late for that, sweetheart. If you do something bad, then there have to be consequences. Now, go ahead and lie on your belly.”

Maggie turned over on the small bed, putting her head to the side so she could watch the odd man. Her jaw went limp, and her muscles tensed as the man took all of his clothes off. He picked up his belt.

“OK, now this is going to hurt me more than it hurts you,” the man said calmly, as he slashed the belt across her bare ass. He whipped the belt across her flesh two more times before he told her to turn onto her back again.

The man stood over Maggie naked, with an erect penis. Her head was buzzing, and her own heartbeat hammered against her eardrums. She didn't know what would happen next and feared that he was about to kill her. She began yelling, “No!” over and over again.

Less than a minute later, John William came into the room. He strode over to the bed and bent down close to her ear.

“Listen, you little bitch. This guy ain't just anybody. He owns that virgin pussy of yours and has every right to have it. Now stop yelling before I crack your fucking head open.”

After John William left the room, the man approached the bed again. “Now, where were we?” he asked with a sickeningly sweet smile. “Oh yes, you were about to show me how sorry you were for being a bad girl today.”

Then the man slid on top of Maggie and began to kiss her. Maggie wiggled under his weight as she struggled to breathe. The man seemed not to notice as he stuck his large tongue into her small mouth. She was confused and petrified. Maggie was utterly helpless to fight back. After an extended period of touching and kissing her, the man entered her swiftly. She felt as though he had rammed a burning stick between her legs. Maggie's shrill scream shattered the silence of the room, and this made the man even more eager to proceed. Then, after about a minute, Maggie faded into a state of shock. The darkness, which she had feared just the night before, swaddled her and provided an escape from her misery.

Maggie lay motionless as the stranger took her virginity in a dirty, depressing room on the second floor of an abandoned prison.