

THE GIRL  
WHO WAS  
SUPPOSED  
TO DIE





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A P R I L   H E N R Y

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CHAPTER 1  
DAY 1, 4:51 P.M.  
FINISH HER OFF

I wake up.

But wake up isn't quite right. That implies sleeping. A bed. A pillow.

I come to.

Instead of a pillow, my right cheek is pressed against something hard, rough, and gritty. A worn wood floor.

My mouth tastes like old pennies. Blood. With my eyes still closed, I gently touch my teeth with my tongue. One of them feels loose. The inside of my mouth is shredded and sore. My head aches and there's a faint buzzing in one ear.

And something is wrong with my left hand. The tips of my pinky and ring finger throb with every beat of my heart. The pain is sharp and red.

Two men are talking, their voices a low murmur. Something about no one coming for me. Something about it's too late.

I decide to keep my eyes closed. Not to move. I'm not sure I could anyway. It's not only my tooth that feels wrong.

Footsteps move closer to me. A shoe kicks me in the ribs. Not very hard. More like a nudge. Still, I don't allow myself to react. Through slitted eyes, I see two pairs of men's shoes. One pair of brown boots and one pair of red-brown dress shoes that shade to black on the toes. A distant part of me thinks the color is called oxblood.

"She doesn't know anything," a man says. He doesn't sound angry or even upset. It's a simple statement of fact.

I realize he's right. I don't know anything. What's wrong with me, where I am, who they are. And when I try to think about who I am, what I get is: nothing. A big gray hole. All I know for sure is that I must be in trouble.

"I need to get back to Portland and follow our leads there," the other man says. "You need to take care of things here. Take her out back and finish her off."

"But she's just a kid," the first man says. His tone is not quite so neutral now.

"A kid?" The second man's voice hardens. "If she talks to the cops, she could get us both sent to death row. It's either her or us. It's that simple." His footsteps move away from me. "Call me when you're done."

The other man nudges me with his foot again. A little harder this time.

Behind me, I hear a door open and close.

"Come on. Get up." With a sigh, he leans over and grabs me under my arms. Grunting, he hauls me up from behind. His breath smells bitter, like coffee. I try to keep my body limp, but when my left hand brushes the floor, the

pain in my fingers is an electric shock. My legs stiffen and he pulls me to my feet.

“That’s right,” he says, nudging me forward while still holding me up. “We’re going to take a little walk.”

Since he already knows that I’m conscious, I figure I can open my eyes halfway. We’re in what looks like a cabin, with knotty pine walls and a black wood-burning stove. Yellow stuffing spills from sliced cushions on an old plaid couch and a green high-backed chair. Books lie splayed below an emptied bookcase. Someone was obviously looking for something, but I don’t know what, and I don’t know if they found it. Past the red-and-white-checkered curtains lie nothing but fir trees.

With the guy’s arm clamped around my shoulders, I stumble past a table with four wood chairs. One of them is turned away from the table. Ropes loosely encircle the arms. A pair of bloody pliers sits on the table next to what look like two silver-white chips mostly painted pink.

I look down at my limp left hand. Pink polish on three of the nails. The tips of the last two fingers are wet and red where nails used to be.

I think I know where I was before I ended up on the floor.

I keep every step small and shuffling so that he’s half carrying me. It’s not easy because he’s not much bigger than me, maybe five foot nine. The guy mutters under his breath, but that’s all. Maybe he doesn’t want to get to where we are going any more than I do. The back door is about twenty feet away.

Outside, a car starts up and then drives away. The only



other sounds are the wind in the trees outside and the man grunting every now and then as he tries to make my body walk in a straight line.

Wherever we are, I think we're alone. It's just me and this guy. And once he manages to get me out the door, he'll follow instructions.

He'll finish me off.

Kill me.

CHAPTER 2  
DAY 1, 4:54 P.M.  
PLAYING DEAD

**W**e keep walking toward the back door of the cabin. Except the guy holding me up is doing most of the walking. My left knee bangs into the nearest chair. I don't lift my feet, letting my toes drag on the ground. I'm trying to buy myself some time. Trying to figure out how to save myself. My half-closed eyes flick from side to side, looking for a weapon. Looking for anything that could help me. But there's no iron poker next to the wood stove, no knives on the counter, no old-fashioned black telephone on the wall. Just gaping drawers and emptied out cupboards and a big mess on the floor—cookie sheets and cans and dishtowels and boxes of cereal and crackers that have been upended and shaken empty.

He has to take one hand away from me to open the door. "*Don't act. Be,*" a voice whispers inside my head. I picture my consciousness dwindling. I let my body go limp,

and slide from his grasp. It's tough to stay slack when my fingertips hit the rough wood. The pain arcs up my arm like I just stuck my fingers in a light socket. Still, I keep tumbling loosely to the floor it as if I'm completely out.

Playing dead. Hoping I won't *be* dead soon. Maybe if he thinks I'm unconscious, he'll let his guard down.

With a sigh, the man steps over me, and kicks the door open, letting in a wave of cold air. He leans down and rolls me over so that I'm face up again. It's so hard not to stiffen, especially as every bit of me feels tender and bruised, but I bite my tongue and try to remain loose. Then he grabs me under the arms and begins to drag me backward, grunting at every step. His chin brushes the top of my head.

He can't see my face. I wonder if that's a mistake. It will be easier to kill me if he doesn't have to look into my pleading eyes. Doesn't have to see my lips tremble as I beg for my life.

My feet thump over the sill. I open my eyes again. I see a worn earthen path stretching back to the cabin, my feet in blue Nike running shoes, my legs in skinny jeans. Reddish brown stains splotch the thighs. I wonder if the blood is only from my fingers.

I let my hands, even the broken one, trail along the ground. Under my fingertips, I feel cold earth, ridged with footprints, muddy in spots. A stick about as big around as one of my fingers. And then my good hand closes on a rock, small enough to fit into my palm, rounded on one side, with one sharp edge.

If this man has a gun—which seems more than

likely—the rock won't help me much. Even David had the help of a slingshot when he used a stone to kill Goliath.

The going is easier now. Pine trees surround us and my heels slide over copper-colored needles. I can't imagine this guy, who by now is breathing heavily, will drag me for miles and miles. Soon he'll drop me, take out his more-than-likely gun, and shoot me in the head. Or the heart. Or maybe both.

I'm going to die and I don't know why.

I don't even know who I am.

I wonder if he'll bother to bury me. Or maybe he'll just leave my body for whatever lives in these woods.

*No!* The thought is so fierce I have to clamp my lips together to keep from shouting it. I can't wait for *him* to choose what happens to me. I can't just wait for him to kill me.

He's dragging me past a small tree. I stick out one leg and hook my foot around the trunk. We jerk to a stop.

"Come on now." He sighs. "Let's not make this harder than it has to be."

He lifts me to reposition his grip. I manage to get my feet under me. He's so close his breath stirs the hair on the nape of my neck.

I don't know what I'm going to do until suddenly I'm doing it. My right elbow drives back like a piston, landing square in his belly. He grunts in an explosion of air and starts to fold up. The bottom of my right fist is already swinging down to hammer his groin. And then I swing my hand up, twisting it until the back of my fist hits him square in the

face. Hard. And made even harder by the rock I hold in my hand. Under my knuckles, I feel the bridge of his nose crack.

I spin around to face him. His eyes are half closed in pain. Blood runs from his nose, red as paint. His right hand reaches out to grab me. My left hand rises, bent at the wrist like the neck of a crane, and knocks his hand away. Then my hand snaps back and claws down, fingers spread, my remaining fingernails digging into his cheeks, leaving furrows that immediately fill with blood. He cries out and puts his hands to his face.

Leaving his throat unprotected. I draw back my hand, my fingers close together and bent at the second knuckle. And I drive them into his throat as hard as I can.

And then he's lying flat on his back, not moving.

I'm not sure he's even breathing.

All my moves were automatic. I didn't have to think. Didn't have to remember anything.

Whoever I am, I already know how to do this.

CHAPTER 3  
DAY 1, 4:58 P.M.  
RAGGED AND  
UNEVEN

The guy who was going to kill me is lying on the ground, silent and still.

Now what do I do?

My first instinct is to run.

But I'm pretty sure he has a gun. What if he wakes up? He could shoot me before I even make it back to the cabin.

I nudge his shoulder with my foot, ready to jump back if he moves. But he doesn't. He's a white guy, maybe thirty or a little older, slender and on the short side, with thick black hair cut very short. He's wearing dark jeans and a black softshell jacket with a hood. His eyes are half open, his mouth slack.

Is he dead?

I kick him in the side about the same way he kicked me. Without a lot of conviction.

He still doesn't move. But he's definitely breathing.

Although it's not exactly breathing. It's more like gasping. Ragged and uneven.

But at least he's not dead.

I lean over him, my heart racing. I can feel every beat in my ears, in the hollow of my throat, in my mangled fingertips. I'm so afraid he's going to sit up and grab me.

I have to find his gun. But what if I'm wrong about what he was going to do? What if he doesn't even have a gun? Because I think I've really hurt him. Maybe I didn't understand what I heard. Maybe I didn't understand what I saw. Maybe there is a different explanation for what was happening, and it doesn't involve him killing me.

Maybe.

I drop the rock and pull up his jacket, cringing, still worried that he might twist around and grab me. And there it is, in a leather holster threaded through his belt. The gun seems to be made of black plastic, but it looks nothing like a toy.

I don't want to take it. But I know I have to. So that I can I shoot *him* if I need to. I remind myself that this is certainly what he was going to do to me.

But what if I miss? Is it loaded? Does it have a safety? With shaking hands, I slide it out. The whole time I half expect his hand to close over my wrist, but he doesn't stir.

It's a lot heavier than I expected. It weighs at least a couple of pounds. I check the sides and the top, but I don't see anything that looks like a safety. I don't really have a pocket that I can put it in. Even though it can't be much above freezing, I'm not wearing a coat, just Nikes and jeans and a chunky red sweater with no pockets. I stick the gun

down in the back of my waistband and hope I don't end up shooting myself in the butt.

I have to figure out some way to slow him down once he regains consciousness. Because despite how his breathing sounds, sooner or later he will, right? Maybe I can tie him up with his belt. With shaking fingers, I unbuckle his brown belt and start to tug it free. Even as his body rocks back and forth, he stays completely limp. I'm torn between fear that he'll move and fear that he'll stop breathing altogether. Finally, the belt slides free from the last loop. His gun holster falls to the ground.

Nothing changes. His body is still slack. His breathing still hitches. His eyes are still half open. It's only now that I notice where his head landed when he fell. Right on a rock. It's not much bigger than the one I was holding, but it's smeared with blood.

Bitter acid fills my mouth. Did I break his skull? Is he going to die? Did I kill him?

But I had to do what I did. I *had* to.

And if he comes to, I have to make sure he can't kill me. Grunting, I push him onto one side. It takes all my strength. This must be what they mean when they talk about dead weight. In his back pocket, there's the square outline of his wallet. I pull it out and put it in my own back pocket. Then I make a loop out of the belt. One of his hands is pinned under his body and I tug it free. His breathing pauses, but he never stiffens, never even moans. I slide the loop around his wrists, tighten it, and then wind the belt to make a sort of knot. But I don't think it will hold very long if he tries to get loose.



I push him onto his back, onto his bound hands, and hope it will at least slow him down a little. I feel something in one of his front pockets, a rectangular shape that has to be a cell phone.

Gingerly, I fish out the phone, and then a set of keys. On the ring is a flat black plastic triangle with two buttons. A fob, the kind that opens a car. I know that much. What I don't is if I know how to drive a car. Or if there is even a car back at the cabin for me to drive.

I have a feeling I'm going to figure things out in a couple of minutes.

I sure hope the answer to both questions is yes.

CHAPTER 4  
DAY 1, 5:09 P.M.  
HEAD FOR THE ROAD

I run back to the cabin, following the path and the two faint ruts my heels left. I'm holding the gun. I just hope I can pull the trigger if I have to.

The cabin door is still ajar. I don't hear or see anyone. I step across the sill. It's as cold inside as it is out.

When I take two more steps inside, I see a face. Staring back at me.

I jerk to a stop, my heart leaping in my chest.

It's a girl. Her mouth opens as if to sound the alarm that I am free. That I am alive. When I am supposed to be neither of these things. I scream and raise the gun, holding it with both hands.

The girl facing me does the same.

It's a mirror, of course. A mirror with coat hooks hanging above it. One of them holds a coat that covers most of

the frame. I kick through the mess on the floor, push the coat aside, and stare at myself. At me. At who I must be.

Only it's a face I don't recognize.

Snarled blond hair that falls to the shoulders. To *my* shoulders. Fifteen, sixteen, seventeen? Wide blue eyes. Straight nose with a bit of a bump at the bridge. Lips that look swollen. Skin so pale that the freckles on my cheeks stand out like flecks spattered from a paintbrush. Am I always this pale, or is it from shock and blood loss? What I think is the beginning of a bruise shadows my jaw. My heart pounds in my throat and bloody fingertips. I want to throw up.

Instead, I open my lips to look at my teeth. Even and white. I slide my index finger in my mouth and touch the tooth that felt loose before, the bottom left eye tooth. It wiggles. I snatch my hand back, afraid I'll make it fall out. I've already lost so much: my fingernails, my name, my identity. I don't need to lose my tooth, too.

I peek out the red-and-white-checkered curtains next to the front door, then push one aside when I see nothing and nobody. Just an empty dark blue SUV and trees and a muddy road. I tuck the gun in my waistband then take the keys out of my pocket and press the fob. The tail lights of the SUV flash, and something inside me loosens. I'll be able to get away.

I've got to get help. Get to safety. Before I go, I take a quick look around for anything useful I can take with me. For any clues as to what happened here, who I am, why someone would want to kill me.

The black stove is unlit. Above it is a stone mantel made

of river rocks, the only place that hasn't been subject to the search-and-destroy mission. The two men must have seen no point in tossing the found objects lined up there: a long, speckled feather; a leaf reduced to a white skeleton; half a sky-blue eggshell that could fit over my pinkie. And in the middle, a framed photo. In it, a man stands with his arms around a woman's shoulders. The woman holds a little boy, a toddler, by the hand. A girl stands next to them, grinning. She holds her hands apart as if she is measuring something.

I am that girl. I look in the mirror again and back down. Even though I think I'm a little older than the girl in the photo, it's clearly me. I have no idea who the rest of them are.

I take the coat off the hook. It's heavy brown canvas with a green plaid lining. I think it's a man's coat, maybe the man in the photo. I put it on, curling my damaged fingers when I push them through the sleeve so they don't touch the cloth. The cuffs hang to just above my fingertips. I slide the photo into one of the coat's front patch pockets.

I quickly check the two small bedrooms. One has a double bed, the other has two sets of bunk beds. The sheets have been yanked off and the mattresses hang half off the bed, slit open. On the floor of each closet, there's a small heap of clothes and hangers, along with a jumble of boots, skis, snowboards, fishing poles, old games, mismatched sheets, and faded blankets. Dresser drawers gape open, but the drawers are nearly empty. I see wool socks, a blue bandanna, a hairbrush with a few blond hairs wound around the bristles. I'm too nervous to keep looking. The back of

my neck itches, and I keep jerking my head around, expecting to see the guy I left tied up standing in the doorway.

Only, no one is ever there.

In the bathroom, shampoo, conditioner, and sunscreen have been squirted from their now empty bottles. I get lucky and find a few dry Band-Aids lying next to a mess of ruined ones. I wrap my poor throbbing fingers and let the wrappers fall to the floor. I'm heading toward the door before I've even got the second one all the way wrapped.

Twenty seconds later I'm sitting in a stranger's car, with a stranger's coat on my back, and with the picture of some more strangers in my pocket.

And then there's the gun on the seat beside me.

I put the key in the ignition, turn the key, and release the emergency brake. All these things happen automatically.

So I guess I know how to do this. I revise my age upward. I'm probably at least 16. With my hands slick on the wheel, I turn in a big circle and head for the road.

CHAPTER 5  
DAY 1, 5:23 P.M.  
WHAT IF SOMEONE  
FINDS ME FIRST?

I follow a set of graveled tracks pitted with muddy puddles. They wind between tall fir trees, and then suddenly ahead of me is a road. I come to a stop. It's a narrow road with soft shoulders, just big enough for two cars. Not even a white line down the middle. No street signs. Nothing to tell me where I am. Or where to go.

I wait for a few seconds, but no cars pass. There are no streetlights or even telephone poles, and it's only then that I realize it's growing dark. The clock on the dash says 5:23. It must be late fall, or early spring. No signs of old snow, so I'm guessing fall.

Which way should I go? Left or right? The road slopes down from left to right. It feels like I'm up in the mountains someplace. If I turn left and go higher, I could be turning away from civilization.

So I turn right, my damp palms sliding on the wheel.

And only realize after I hear the *tick-tick-tick* that I put on the turn signal first, like there's someone else out here to see.

As I drive down the new road, I look for other cabins, other roads, signs, some evidence of people, of a place I can go to for help, but there's nothing. Just trees pressing up against the edges of the road. The speedometer says I'm going only thirty miles an hour, but I'm afraid to go faster. Are my lights on? I watch the road and see them, two pale cones of light pushing ahead of me. It's definitely getting darker. The sun is sliding down behind the trees on my right. That must mean I'm driving south.

Why do I keep gathering scraps of facts? Like, what difference does it make if it's day or night? Winter or summer? What difference does it make which direction I'm going?

What's important is that I don't know who I am.

And that two men want to kill me.

As I'm going around a bend, a blue Subaru wagon suddenly appears and passes me. It's gone before I can decide what to do. The next time I see a car, should I honk and flash my lights and scream out my window that I'm in trouble? But the person driving the car that passed me was a guy. And I never saw the man who gave the order to finish me off. What if I try to stop someone and it turns out to be the person who ordered my death? What if he's coming back to find out where his friend is?

It's not safe to ask for help out here. Not where there aren't any witnesses. I'll keep driving until I get to a town. And then I'll find the police station. They'll know what to do. They'll know how to help me.

Then I remember the guy's phone in my pocket. I could call 9-1-1 right now!

Without thinking, I slide my hand past my open coat and start to wiggle my fingers into the left pocket of my jeans. Ouch! Tears spring to my eyes, and I yank my poor bloody fingers back as if they just got bitten.

The pain gives me a chance to think. What would I tell the 9-1-1 operator? All I know is that I'm on a road up in the mountains. Period. That isn't enough for them to come find me. Cell towers are probably few and far between out here. And I don't want to sit and wait while they figure out where I am.

Because what if someone else finds me first?

No. I'll just keep driving. I won't stop anyone for help, and I won't try to call anyone.

But that doesn't stop someone from calling me. Or rather, from calling the guy I left tied up in the woods, barely breathing. Because there's a buzz coming from my left hip.

What will the person calling do when the guy doesn't answer? Will they know that something is wrong? Will they find him—and then set out to find me?

I push down on the accelerator.