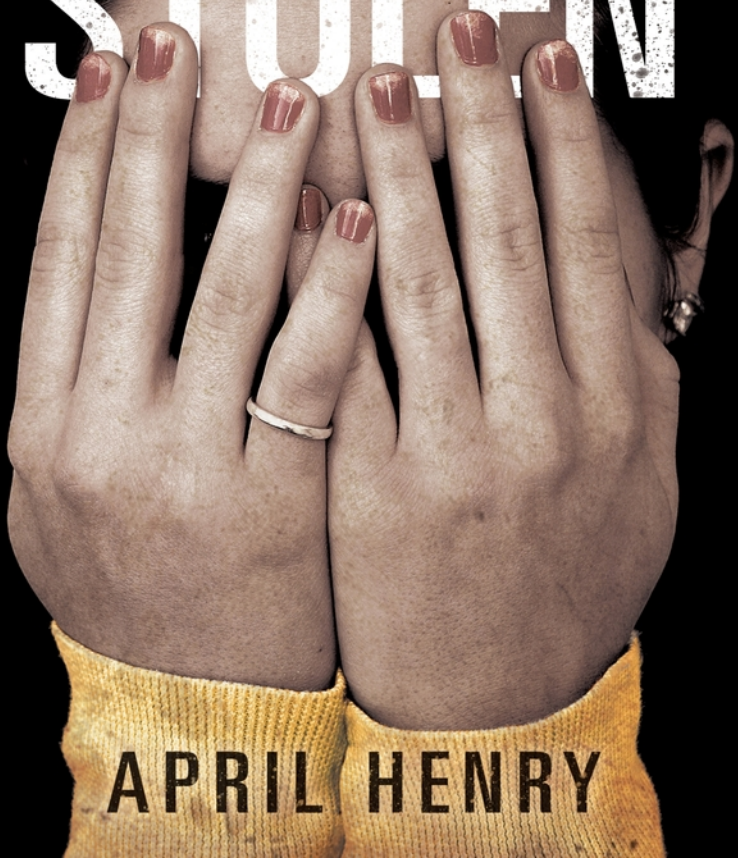


GIRL,

HOW DO YOU ESCAPE WHEN YOU CAN'T SEE THE WAY OUT?

STOLEN



APRIL HENRY

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

April Henry is the author of many acclaimed mysteries for adults and young adults. Her novel *Face of Betrayal*, which she co-wrote with Lis Wiehl, was a *New York Times* bestseller. She lives in Oregon.

April says, “*Girl, Stolen* was inspired by a story I saw on the local news. A blind girl had gone out to dinner with her parents. They wanted to do some Christmas shopping, and the girl stayed behind. Just like in *Girl, Stolen*, the mom left the keys in the car and someone stole it. In real life the girl was in the car for only a couple of miles. When she let the driver know she was there, he let her out. I watched her story that night and immediately thought, ‘What if?’

“I read a lot of autobiographies by people who were born blind or went blind, and I interviewed people who were blind, including a girl who was mainstreamed at a high school. I also talked to an eye doctor about head injuries and blindness. And I went to a Guide Dog School for the Blind and spent a day there. Toward the end, they put a blindfold on me and then gave me a dog and a harness and told me to put the latter on the former. That was difficult because I had never seen a harness up close and you have to pull on them to get them to fit snugly. I was worried I might hurt the dog, but I finally got it on. I was very proud of myself – until I tried to pat the dog on the head and realized I had harnessed up the back end!”

Visit April online at **www.aprilhenrymysteries.com**

GIRL, STOLEN

APRIL HENRY



WALKER
BOOKS

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First published in Great Britain 2012 by Walker Books Ltd
87 Vauxhall Walk, London SE11 5HJ

12 14 16 18 20 19 17 15 13

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This book has been typeset in Baskerville

Printed and bound by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon CR0 4YY

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data:
a catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-1-4063-3485-2

www.walker.co.uk



For Sadie, who showed me our shadows walking backward



A THOUSAND THINGS WRONG

Cheyenne heard the car door open. She didn't move from where she lay curled on the backseat, her head resting on her bent arm. Despite the blanket that covered her, Cheyenne was shivering.

She had begged her stepmom to leave the keys in the car so she could turn on the heat if she got cold. After some back-and-forthing, Danielle had agreed. That had only been five minutes ago, and here she was, already back. Maybe the doctor had phoned in the prescription and Danielle hadn't had to wait for it to be filled.

Now the door slammed closed, the SUV rocking a little as weight settled into the driver's seat. The engine started. The emergency brake clunked as it was released. The car jerked into reverse.

It was a thousand little things that told Cheyenne something was wrong. Even the way the door closed

hadn't sounded right. Too fast and too hard for Danielle. The breathing was all wrong too, speeded up and harsh. Cheyenne sniffed. The smell of cigarettes. But Danielle didn't smoke and, as a nurse, couldn't stand anyone who did.

There was no way the person driving the car was her stepmom.

But why would someone else have gotten in the car? It was a Cadillac Escalade, so it wasn't likely someone had just gotten confused and thought it was their car.

Then she remembered the keys. Somebody was stealing the car!

And Cheyenne was pretty sure they didn't know she was in it.

She froze, wondering how much the blanket covered her. She couldn't feel it on the top of her head.

Cheyenne felt like a mouse she had seen in the kitchen one time when she turned on the light before school. Caught in the middle of the floor, it had stood stock-still. Like maybe she wouldn't notice it if it didn't move.

But it hadn't worked for the mouse, and now it didn't work for Cheyenne. She must have made some small sound. Or maybe the thief had looked back to see if someone was following and then realized what the shape was underneath the blanket.

A swear word. A guy's voice. She had already halfway known that it was a guy, the way she sometimes just knew things now.

“Who the hell are you?” His voice broke in surprise.

“What are you doing in Danielle’s car?”

Their words collided and tangled. Both of them speaking too fast, almost yelling.

Sitting up, she scrambled back against the door, the one farthest from him. “Stop our car and get out!”

“No!” he shouted back. The engine surged as he drove faster.

Cheyenne realized she was being kidnapped.

But she couldn’t see the guy who was kidnapping her or where they were going.

Because for the last three years, Cheyenne had been blind.



DRAWING BLOOD

The girl in the backseat wouldn't stop yelling. She had black hair and huge brown eyes, wide with fright. Maybe she was pretty. Griffin didn't know. All he knew was that right now she was a big problem. Even though he was freaking out, he forced himself to think. Thank God no one was nearby.

If he stopped and let her out, the way she kept demanding, this girl would run screaming to the first person she saw. In ten minutes or less, he would be arrested. And then the cops would naturally drive out to their house, and everything would unravel. All of them in jail. Probably for a long time.

Instead of slowing down, Griffin accelerated as he turned out of the far end of the parking lot. It threw the girl off balance. He winced as her head clunked against the window, but still he kept going. He was acting on pure instinct now. And instinct told him to get as far away as

possible. Growing up around Roy, you got pretty good at running. Running and hiding.

Griffin caught a break, hitting a gap in traffic. He drove as fast as he could across the freeway overpass. The Escalade leaped forward when he pressed the accelerator, hitting sixty-five with no sign of strain.

With the way today was going, the cops would pull him over for speeding. Griffin needed time to think this through, but there was no way he could afford to take it. He figured he had to put as much distance as he could between whoever had been driving this car and the girl in the backseat, who must belong to them. To get away from any witnesses who might be calling 9-1-1 on their mobiles right now. Cutting in front of a red Honda, he took the next corner on two wheels, getting off the main road.

He pounded the side of his head in frustration. How could he have been so stupid as to not notice that there was someone in the car? Griffin could hear Roy shouting at him, almost as real as the girl in the backseat, the girl who wouldn't stop yelling.

He hadn't been able to see past the keys dangling in the ignition. It was that simple, and that senseless. Griffin had been walking down the long rows of vehicles, looking like any other stressed-out Christmas shopper who couldn't find his car. Instead, he was looking for packages he could boost. The packages came from the big, boxy stores that surrounded the acres and acres of the shopping center's

parking lot. (The whole place was so big that most people left one store, got in their cars, and drove the equivalent of three blocks to the next store.)

Thanks to Roy, Griffin knew how to get in and out of a locked car in under a minute. He could do it even when someone was climbing out of the next car, and they wouldn't notice a thing. Sometimes, just for a thrill, Griffin would even give a nod as he straightened up with the J. Crew bag or the box from Abercrombie. Then he would stroll down to his own car, parked near one of the exits, and put the bags in the trunk. After the trunk was full, he would drive into Portland and across the river to Eighty-second Avenue, where any of a string of secondhand stores was happy to buy new merchandise for resale, no questions asked.

The Escalade had been a gift, a surprise present meant just for him. Anyone who was stupid enough to leave the keys dangling from the ignition, in full view of the world, deserved to have the car taken away. And he couldn't wait to bring it home and present it to Roy.

That's what Griffin had thought, anyway, until the blanket in the backseat turned out to have a girl underneath it.

Ignoring the girl, ignoring his own panicked thoughts, the explanations and rationalizations he was already practicing for when he got back home, Griffin drove as fast as he could without losing control. Too fast for her to risk jumping out. He kept his head half turned, one eye on the

road and the other on her. Weaving around slower cars, Griffin took a side street, and then another, until finally he was on an empty road that cut through a piece of scrubland. On each corner, a big white sign advertised it for sale to any interested developers.

As soon as he slowed down, the girl came at him, outstretched hands curved into claws, screaming like a banshee. Her head was cocked to one side, and her eyes were wide and staring. She looked crazy. Maybe she was.

Throwing the car into park, Griffin tried to deflect her, raising his shoulder and turning his head. At least no one was around to hear her. Her fingernails raked down his right cheek, and he could feel she had drawn blood.

He had to do something, but what? He squeezed between the seats. Griffin just wanted her to calm down, but he ended up wrestling with her, both of them struggling in a desperate silence. Finally, he managed to straddle her and pin her arms to her sides. He was bigger than she was, and he was working on pure adrenaline. At least she had stopped screaming. The sound of their ragged breathing filled the car. He became aware of a quiet hum – he had never had time to turn off the car. Straightening up, he managed to quickly reach over and turn off the key.

“I’m sorry,” he said into the complete silence. “Let’s talk about this. But you have to promise that you’ll stop trying to kill me.”

“I will.” She nodded, her eyes not meeting his. Griffin

figured she was probably lying. In the same situation, he knew he would lie.

He exhaled. "Look, it's an accident you're here. I just wanted the car, not you. I didn't even know you were *in* the car."

"Then let me go." Her voice was low and hoarse. She took a deep breath and then started to cough, a deep, racking sound. She kept her head turned away but still, little flecks of spit landed on him. When she spoke again, it was in a whisper. "Please, please, just let me go. I won't tell anyone."

Even Griffin wasn't that dumb. "I'm sorry, but do you think I really believe that? By the end of the day, my description would be handed out to every cop and broadcast on every radio station in town."

A strange expression played across her face, the ghost of a smile. In the cold, the engine ticked as it cooled. "But I won't be able to tell them anything. Didn't you notice that I'm blind?"

Blind? Griffin stared at her dark eyes. He had thought they weren't really meeting his because she was looking past him for help, searching for a way out, assessing the situation.

"You're really blind?"

"My cane's on the floor."

Still wondering if she was tricking him somehow, he looked on the floor. Sitting next to a small black purse behind the driver's seat was a folded bundle of white sticks.

Griffin imagined doing what she asked. He could let her get out. Maybe give her her cane, maybe not. She could probably hear cars okay, and it wasn't like there were a lot of them. Instead of getting run over, she would flag down the next vehicle that came along. But as soon as someone stopped for her, it wouldn't be long until the police were involved. The brand-new Escalade didn't exactly blend in. What if someone passed by here only a minute or two after he let her go? He was thirty miles from home, thirty miles from where he could hide the car. It would be all too easy to track him down. And after that, it was still the same nightmare scenario. All of them locked up and the key thrown away for good.

No. Better to keep her for a little while yet. Ask Roy what to do, even though he wouldn't be happy about Griffin bringing back trouble. Better to bring it back than to leave it out here, ready to explode and engulf them all in the fallout. Besides, Griffin already had an idea. Tonight, after it got dark, he could drive this girl someplace deserted and let her out and then drive away again. Leave her someplace where it would be hours before anyone found her. Just like she asked, only with a lot less chance of being caught. But not here. Not now. Not in daylight. Not when a car might come by at any moment.

As if to make the thought real, he heard a car in the distance. Approaching them.

"I can't let you go," he said, and was starting to add, "not

right now,” but before Griffin even got the next word out of his mouth she was fighting him again, opening her mouth to scream. What could he do? Then he had an idea. He didn’t know if it would work, but he had to do something. Desperately, he groped across the passenger seat until his fingers closed on what he needed.

Griffin pressed the barrel against her temple.

“Shut up or I’ll shoot you.”



EVERY REASON TO LIE

Cheyenne froze at the touch of the cold metal. She could tell that he meant what he said. He sounded angry and out of control, just like she felt. They were both quiet until the car passed them and the sound of its engine faded. She could feel her strength draining away with it.

“Look – can’t you just chill?” His voice sounded a little calmer. She made herself nod.

“I don’t need this crap. I don’t need you screaming and kicking and scratching. I can’t think when you do that. So are you going to be quiet?”

Cheyenne nodded again, wishing she could curl up into a tighter and tighter ball, grow smaller and smaller until she just disappeared.

“I *am* going to let you go,” he insisted.

Something must have flickered on her face, betrayed her doubt.

“I *am*! Just not now. Right now, I’m going to have to tie you up and cover you with the blanket so that no one can see you. And tonight, once it’s dark, I’ll let you go.”

Her head ached where it had slammed against the window. That had probably only been five minutes ago, but it felt like a lifetime. Where were they now that he felt he could hold her down in the backseat without anyone noticing? That lone car had been the only one she had heard since he had turned onto this road.

“Take off your shoes.” Cheyenne thought he was trying to stop her from running away, until he added, “And pull out the laces.”

She did as he asked, wondering where the gun was pointing. At her head, at her heart? Or had he already set it down? The tiny slice of blurry vision she had left didn’t reveal any clues. He ordered her to lie down on her side, facing the seat, then tied her hands together behind her. Cheyenne knew he couldn’t be holding the gun when he did that, but even so, he could still pick it up and shoot her if she gave him any trouble. She did as he asked, but at the same time tensed her wrists and held them as far apart as she dared. With the second shoelace, he tied her ankles together. Why couldn’t she have worn loafers?

Her mind raced. When he was finished, she rolled over so that she was facing him. She wanted him to see her face, to see her eyes even if she couldn’t see his. It would probably be easier to shoot someone in the back.

She didn't want to make it easy for him.

Cheyenne heard him pick up her purse and begin to rummage through it.

"Are you looking for money?" she said. "Because I don't have much."

Cheyenne knew she had a twenty, two tens, and some ones. The twenty was folded the long way, the ten the short way, and the ones weren't folded at all. Whenever she got money back from someone else, she asked which bill was which and then folded it. Every blind person had their own way of folding money to tell it apart. Coins were a lot easier. Each was a different diameter and thickness, and some had smooth edges and some didn't. Even before the accident, when a coin fell to the floor, Cheyenne had been able to tell what it was, just by the sound it made.

Now she offered him a bargaining chip. "I do have an ATM card. Let me go, and I'll give you my PIN. I've got over three thousand dollars in my account."

"Three thousand dollars?" There was something about his voice that made Cheyenne think he was younger than she had first thought. He sounded incredulous.

She dared to let herself hope. "You can have all of it. I don't think you can get more than a thousand out at a time, but I won't tell them that you have the card. I swear."

"I don't want your money!" There was a strange tone to his voice. It was almost like he was hurt by her accusation, which didn't make any sense. It was okay to steal a car,

it was okay to kidnap her, but it wasn't okay to take her money? "I'm looking in your purse for something to gag you with."

"You can't. I'm really sick. If you gag me, I won't be able to breathe." It wasn't a lie, but it wasn't the whole truth, either. But if he gagged her, it would make it that much less likely that she would be able to get help.

Cheyenne was shaking, partly with fear, and partly, she thought, because her temperature must be spiking again. It had been one hundred and two in the doctor's office. Dr. Guinn had prescribed antibiotics and said Cheyenne would be all done with them by Christmas. Now the thought struck like a blow to the stomach. *Will I be alive to see Christmas at all?* "That's why we were at the shopping center, so my stepmom could pick up my prescription at the pharmacy. If I can't breathe through my mouth, I'll smother."

He hesitated for a long time. Finally he said roughly, "Promise you won't scream?"

"I promise." Why should either of them believe the other? Cheyenne wondered bleakly as he pulled the blanket over her. They had no reason to tell the truth and every reason to lie. Which meant that he could be planning to hurt her, to chain her up in his basement for years, to shoot her in the heart. Just like she was thinking about how to get away, to get someone's attention, to hurt him so bad that he couldn't hurt her back. There was no point in either one of them trusting the other.

Even though he had pulled the blanket over her head as well as her body, the kidnapper had arranged it so it didn't cover her face. Good. She could still breathe. And because he could see her face, he would remember she was a person, not a long bundle like a rolled-up carpet. It would be a lot easier to shoot a rolled-up carpet. She heard him climb back into the front seat and then the car started.

Cheyenne tried to figure out the direction the car was heading, but she had lost track in the first few minutes after he stole it. All she knew was that the road was quiet and that couldn't be good for her. Quiet meant no one to notice. Quiet meant he could kill her or do whatever he wanted and no one would know. Her thoughts became darker. Danielle and her dad would be called in to identify her body. What would this man do after she was dead? Would he leave her body in the car and abandon both on some logging road that no one would venture down until spring? Or tumble her out into a ditch in the countryside? Or bury her in a shallow grave in the mountains?

The only thing that might save her life was the fact that she couldn't describe what he looked like.

But if Cheyenne couldn't see, how could she escape?



WHO'S IN CHARGE NOW?

Griffin turned the key in the ignition and drove away, still feeling amazed. He started to push the cigarette lighter back into the console, but then stopped and put it in his pocket. He might need it again. He had been afraid that the girl might try to shove his hand away when he threatened to shoot her. Instead she had frozen with fear.

The fact that she had really believed the car's lighter was a gun made Griffin feel oddly powerful. Like he could just wish and make it so.

When music started playing behind him, he almost drove off the road. Then he realized it was a mobile phone playing the first few notes to a popular song. After pulling over, Griffin reached back for her purse. He looked in the phone's window that showed caller ID. "It says Danielle Wilder," he said. "Who's that?"

"My stepmom." She gave him what he guessed she

thought was a friendly smile. It was more like a dog baring its teeth. “Let me talk to her and it will buy you some time. I’ll tell her she parked in a different row than she thinks. She was in a hurry when she went into the drugstore. It will keep her looking for a few more minutes.”

“I don’t think so,” Griffin said, and watched the fake smile fall from her face like a plate from a shelf. He pressed the power button on the phone until the display dwindled and went black. But even with the power off, could the police somehow trace the phone? He slid the window down and threw the phone as far as he could, where it landed in a tangle of blackberry bushes. Too late, he remembered his fingerprints would be on it. He had taken off his gloves to tie her up and then neglected to put them back on again. He swore under his breath. Stupid, stupid, stupid. He was just as dumb as Roy always said. Why couldn’t he ever think things through? Feeling his pulse thrumming in his temples, Griffin tried to reassure himself that it would be all right. No one would find that phone for years.

He pulled back onto the road. When he came to a fork, he took a back way that wound between fields. Here the houses were miles apart. He got a cigarette out of his shirt pocket and flicked his lighter.

“You are *not* going to smoke in my stepmom’s car!”

“What?” He was half amused, half angry. Didn’t she realize who was in charge now?

“First of all, I’m sick. I can barely breathe as it is. Second,

my stepmom will kill you if you stink up her car.”

Griffin snorted. But he took the cigarette out of his mouth and put it and the lighter back in his shirt pocket.

For a long time, the car was absolutely silent except for the ragged sound of the girl’s breathing. After about fifteen minutes, he saw a car approaching them. As it got closer, he tensed. Would she try to signal somehow, maybe press her feet against the window, or heave herself up so that her face appeared? He angled the rearview mirror so he could look at her. He watched her face tense and could tell she was weighing her options, the same as he would have in her place. But there weren’t many. The car passed without incident. The driver was an older man talking on a mobile. Griffin doubted that the Escalade had even registered on his consciousness.

Her voice, coming from under the blanket, made him jump. “What’s your name?”

“What? Are you serious? Do you really think I would tell you that?” He countered with, “What’s *your* name?” For a second, Griffin thought of what it must be like to be her. To be blind. Like being on an amusement park ride in the dark, one of those rides where skeletons jumped out at you or ghosts glided up behind you and you only knew they were there when they wailed in your ear.

“It’s Cheyenne,” she said softly. “Cheyenne Wilder.”

“Why did your parents name you Cheyenne?” Griffin asked as they drove past two horses – one brown and one

black – running free. His eyes followed them for a moment. “Isn’t that an Indian tribe?”

“I’m one-thirty-second Indian. Not enough to really matter.”

High cheekbones, dark hair, dark eyes – he could see it. His panic had eased a little. “How old are you?” he asked. It was hard to tell. Fourteen? Eighteen? She was smaller than him, maybe five two, and not wearing any makeup, but she also seemed self-assured. Maybe you had to grow up fast if you were blind.

“Sixteen.”

“How come you’re blind?”

Instead of answering, Cheyenne shifted and changed the subject. “Where are you taking me?”

He shook his head, forgetting again that she couldn’t see him. Then he said, “I can’t tell you that.”

“Well, then, how long until we get there?”

“When we do.” An odd flash of memory, some vacation with his parents. His dad just drove, never taking his eyes off the road and never answering Griffin’s questions. His mom turned around in the seat and talked to him, snuck him little snacks. They had played games, like spotting as many different license plates as they could, or vying with each other to think of animals whose names started with each letter of the alphabet. “*Ape, bear, cheetah...*” Griffin hadn’t thought about that trip for a long time.

He looked back at Cheyenne again. Her eyes were open

but unfocused, which was kind of freaky. It reminded him of parties he had been to, people so drugged or drunk they were lost in their own world. It was weird that he could look at her and she wouldn't know.

As he watched, Cheyenne began to cough again, explosions that jerked her body around on the seat. Finally, she choked out, "Can you get me a cough drop from my purse?"

He pulled off on a gravel turnout but left the engine running. After rummaging in her purse, he found a pack of cough drops. "Here you go," he said. She opened her mouth. Even though he hadn't been to mass since his mom left when he was ten, Griffin suddenly felt like a priest with a communion wafer. As he gave Cheyenne the cough drop, his fingertips grazed her lips.

"Look," he said, "I'm going to need to cover your face for a second. And when we stop, I'll need you to stay quiet, okay?"

For a moment, the only sound was her sucking on the lozenge. Then finally she nodded.

Griffin pulled the blanket loosely over her face, then put the car in gear and drove on. As he did, he unconsciously rubbed his fingertips together, the ones that had touched her lips.



HERE BE DRAGONS

The kidnapper couldn't see her. Nobody could see her. It was like she was invisible. As she lay on the backseat of the car, hidden under the blanket, Cheyenne allowed herself to cry without making any sound. In the last three years, she had gotten good at it.

After the accident, her dad had fallen apart. Every night in the hospital, he slept in her room. Her mom would have done the same, but her mom was gone. Her dad traveled so much on business that it was her mom who knew her best, who knew everything about her. Who else would remember that Cheyenne loved chocolate chip Teddy Grahams and was scared of moths? Who was going to take her shopping for bras and talk to her about the kids at school? In the hospital, Cheyenne's dad sometimes woke her up because he was crying in his sleep. She had realized it was her job to be strong for him, so Cheyenne had hid her real feelings, her

real self, so that he wouldn't guess how bad it was.

Now, hidden under the blanket, she felt her chest ache. She didn't know how much of it was from holding the sobs in and how much was from the pneumonia. Danielle had already guessed it was pneumonia by listening with her stethoscope to the crackle in Cheyenne's lungs, as well as the dead area where there should have been breath sounds but weren't. Even though Cheyenne had never seen anything but a blurry slice of Danielle, she still had a clear mental picture of her. Blond, shoulder-length, straight hair and a slender body, looking something like one of a million actresses on TV, although Danielle was smarter than any two or three of them put together.

The visit to the doctor's office had just been a formality, a way to get the prescription that a nurse wasn't allowed to write. The doctor had tapped the X-ray, making a hollow plastic sound, and told them that it showed a shadow over the bottom of Cheyenne's right lung. "With antibiotics, we can knock this thing out in a few days. It will take you some time to regain your stamina, but you'll be well on your way to recovery by the time school starts after Christmas break."

Cheyenne took a long, shuddering breath. Her head felt like it was stuffed with cotton. Everything seemed unreal. This couldn't be happening to her. It was like those old maps from back when they thought the world was flat, where out past the land, far out in the ocean, they had written "Here be Dragons."

She took a deep breath. *Think*, Cheyenne commanded herself. *Concentrate*. She had to use whatever advantages she had. Except she didn't have any. If only Phantom were here! More than anything, she missed him. She wished she hadn't left him at home, but Danielle had thought it would be easier since all they were doing was walking from the car to the doctor's office and back, and she didn't need a guide dog for that. But if Cheyenne had had Phantom with her, this creepy guy wouldn't even have gotten in the car.

Now here she was, blind, kidnapped, tied up, and going who knows where with a criminal. Her mobile phone was gone. And she was very sick.

No! Cheyenne mouthed the word to herself. She had to stay on track. *Think*. She was blind. That was a fact. That was her greatest weakness. But could she somehow use it to her advantage?

And there were a few advantages to being blind – not many, certainly not enough. But a few. For one thing, she knew how to use all her other senses in a way that most sighted people never did. They smelled and heard and touched all the same things she did, but they had let that part of their brain go numb with disuse, so the sensations didn't register. And Cheyenne had learned the hard way to always, always pay attention to what was around her, to pick up as many clues as she could.

So how could she use her senses to her advantage? She

sniffed, but all she could smell was the stale residue of the cigarette smoke on this guy's clothes. Until they stopped and he opened the door, she wouldn't have any clues from her nose. Her ears told her just as little. All she knew was that it had been at least twenty minutes since another car had passed them. And she had long ago lost track of the direction they were headed. They had been on a winding road for a while – but for how long? She twisted her hands until she could run her thumb over the numbers on her Braille watch. It was almost eleven. This guy had stolen the car about forty-five minutes ago. Okay, so they were forty-five miles or less away from the mall. She roughed out the math problem in her head. The result was disheartening. That meant she could be anywhere within a space a little greater than six thousand square miles. Even if they stopped soon, how could her dad and Danielle or even the police find her in all that space?

Cheyenne forced her mind back to the things she might be able to control. Like the guy who had kidnapped her. What could she do to get an advantage over him?

She decided that the first step would be to get him to untie her. *Poor blindy*, that's what she had to make him think. Once she could use her hands, she could find a phone. Or a weapon. She could even take her cane and run away as soon as it was dark. She longed for it to be nighttime, when she would be more than a sighted person's equal.

When they got wherever they were going, she would talk him into freeing her hands. Then she would collect all the clues and tools she could and bide her time. And if it seemed like he was going to do something bad, she wouldn't go quietly. She would give him the fight of his life.

It seemed impossible, but Cheyenne must have fallen asleep. The next thing she knew, the car was lurching down a gravel road so bumpy she almost rolled off the seat. Over the noise in the cab, she heard a dog barking. Judging by how deep the sound was, it was a big dog. And not very well trained.

Another noise was layered over the barking, a high-pitched metallic whine. A saw. The sound, which was coming from someplace in front of the car, abruptly ceased. The window whirred as it glided down. Cold seeped in and pressed against her, even under the blanket. The smells of wood smoke and pine needles filled the car.

The dog stopped barking and started to whine. Footsteps crunched on gravel. Cheyenne's problem had just gotten twice as complicated. Now there were two people, not one. But maybe this new person would see how ridiculous it was that she was a prisoner. Maybe he or she – it would be a lot better if it were a she – would insist that Cheyenne be freed immediately.

But it was a man who spoke, in a rough voice that mingled interest and suspicion. "God damn, Griffin, what's

this?” Cheyenne filed the name away. *Griffin*. If she ever got free – she quickly amended that to *when* – she would make this Griffin pay. “Where’d you get it?”

“At the mall. Somebody left the keys in it.”

“God damn!” The same words, only this time filled with respect. “But what happened to your face?” Good, she *had* hurt Griffin. Then the other man must have realized what was under the blanket, because his tone changed. “What in hell is that in the backseat?”

“It’s a girl.”

“You killed a girl!” Disbelief.

“No, no,” Griffin said hastily. “She’s just tied up. She was in the car. Lying down in the backseat. I didn’t see her at first. And by the time I did, it was too late. So I had to take her with me.”

The smack of flesh meeting flesh. Cheyenne realized that the other man had just slapped Griffin.

“So you brought her back here? That wasn’t a real smart idea. Why am I not surprised that it was you that thought of it?”

“What else did you want me to do?” Griffin whined. “In five more minutes, the place would have been crawling with cops. I had to get away as fast as I could. I’ll just wait until tonight, and go drop her out on a logging road. And then I’ll hightail it out of there.”

“You idiot! She knows what you look like. And now she’s been here. I don’t need to spell it out for you. She’ll say who

we are. She'll get the cops back here. Are you trying to back me into a corner?"

"But she's blind, Dad!"

Dad?



IN CASE THE LAW COMES LOOKING

“Give me her purse,” Roy demanded. He held out his hand. “Let’s see who she is.” He was still angry, that was clear, but Roy was always at least a little bit angry.

The thing was, Griffin thought, watching his dad carefully, his cheek still stinging, how angry was he?

“I already know who she is. Her name’s Cheyenne Wilder.”

He got out of the car. Roy took a step closer. He was all up in Griffin’s face now, nose to nose, which was kind of a surprise. How long had he been nose to nose, eye to eye, with his dad? Sensing the tension, Duke started growling.

Griffin stepped back, holding his hands up in surrender.

His dad spit tobacco out of the side of his mouth. Roy was nothing but muscle and tattoo. Despite the cold,

Roy was dressed the way he always was, in a black leather Harley vest open over a flannel shirt. The sleeves of the shirt had been torn off, ragged over his bulging pecs. The Skoal can in his chest pocket had left a faded circle on the plaid.

Jimbo and TJ came out of the barn. Griffin was glad for the distraction.

“Whoa! What is that?” Jimbo asked, shaking his head in admiration as he took in the Escalade. Even though he had plenty of personal insulation, Jimbo was wearing so many layers he looked like the Michelin man. Jimbo was always cold. “A little something you picked up shopping?”

“Sweet!” TJ chimed in. TJ was skinny and short, not much taller than Cheyenne, with a long dirty blond ponytail poking out of the back of his trucker’s cap.

“Only there’s a problem,” Roy said. The red in his face had faded slightly. “The car came with a little something extra. A girl.”

“A kid,” Griffin felt the need to interject. He could already see TJ perking up, and he didn’t need him to get the wrong idea. “And actually, she’s blind, so she didn’t see anything.”

The two men peered through the half-open window at Cheyenne. Underneath the blanket, she was absolutely still. Griffin hoped she couldn’t hear exactly what they were saying.

“So she’s really blind?” TJ asked in a loud voice.

Griffin saw her flinch under the blanket.

Jimbo nudged TJ. "He said blind, dummy, not deaf."

Roy turned his head to spit tobacco juice. "Did you change the plates?"

"Hey, I didn't know I was going to find a car. I didn't bring any with me."

"Where's the Honda?"

Griffin didn't want to answer, but he had to. "I had to leave it there."

"Where's it at? Don't tell me it's anywhere near where you got this."

"The Honda is in the far end, by the bookshop," Griffin said. "And the Escalade was on the complete opposite end of the parking lot."

"We can't leave it there overnight or someone might connect the dots between one car left in the parking lot and another car that got stolen." Roy thought for a moment. "Give them the keys. You two can take the pickup and go out to Woodlands and get the Honda back."

TJ and Jimbo mumbled agreement. Griffin tossed Jimbo the keys and the two men ambled off toward the pickup. When they were out of earshot, Roy turned to him.

"You've got us in a world of hurt, you know that? For right now, get her in the house. Keep her hands tied up, put her some place she can't cause any problems, and then come back here. I'll put the Escalade in the barn. Don't use names and don't tell her where we are. You and me need to talk about what we're going to do. But not in front of her."

When Griffin opened the car door and leaned in, Cheyenne's body was rigid. As he pulled the blanket back, she rubbed her cheek on the striped scarf she wore around her neck, over her coat. She was, he realized, wiping away tears. The dampness still shone on her red face. It seemed strange that she could cry even when her eyes didn't otherwise work.

He helped her sit up and then said, "I'm going to cut the shoelaces around your ankles now. Don't move." He took out his knife, unfolded the blade. So that he wouldn't slip and cut her, he put one hand between her ankles, just below the taut shoelace, and felt how she trembled.

After cutting the shoelace loose, Griffin helped her up into a sitting position. As he did, Cheyenne whispered to him.

"Just give me my cane and let me go right now. I won't tell anyone anything. I promise."

He kept his answer short. "No." He concentrated on slipping on her laceless shoes.

"Then tonight, when everyone's asleep."

He shook his head and then realized she couldn't see him. But she must have felt the movement because she pressed her lips together until they were a thin white line.

Leaving her purse and her cane on the floor, Griffin began to help Cheyenne out of the car. Duke, not used to seeing strangers, exploded in a frenzy of barking. He strained against the length of his chain.

Instead of shrinking back against Griffin, the way any normal person would, or provoking Duke by trying to run away, Cheyenne stopped and was absolutely still, her head cocked.

The dog didn't seem to know what to think. Griffin doubted he had ever met a human who didn't regard him with fear or kick him with a steel-toed boot. He stopped barking and eyed Cheyenne, a low growl still rumbling in his throat. Roy was staring at Duke, looking back and forth between the dog and Cheyenne. It was the first time Griffin could remember Duke shutting up in the presence of a stranger.

Basically, Duke didn't like new things. If a car came down the road, they knew it long before it showed up. And nobody could just walk around their property, not without Duke throwing himself to the end of his chain, barking and growling. The dog allowed only Roy or Griffin to feed him, and he barely tolerated that. Anyone else who came too near risked losing a body part.

Roy hadn't bought Duke or gotten him at the pound. Duke had been given to him by a customer who sold a little of this and a little of that. The guy had had a big bloody bandage around his upper arm and he had kept his distance from Duke, not really relaxing until he was back behind the wheel of his truck, with a metal door between him and the dog.

Duke was just the kind of dog Griffin's dad had been looking for.

“Easy, boy,” Griffin said now into the silence, pretending like Duke was acting normally. “She’s with us.” Then he nudged the girl forward. “We need to get you in the house.”

They started walking. Griffin kept his hand on her arm. “What kind of dog is he?” Cheyenne said as calmly as if they were talking about somebody’s pet.

“Him? Half pit bull and half mystery meat.”

All muscle and no heart. In truth, Griffin didn’t know what kind of dog Duke was. He looked like he had been put together from a half dozen different dogs, taking only the ugliest parts. He had the short, sleek fur of a pit bull, brindled brown and gold, but scars from fighting marred the tiger’s-eye pattern. One ear stood up, and the other flopped down. His legs were a little too short, and his tail was all wrong for a junkyard dog – fluffy and curved. And with his one droopy eyelid, Duke looked sly. Like he was plotting something.

Now, as they walked toward the house, Griffin found himself strangely glad that Cheyenne couldn’t see where he lived. Just having her by his side made him view the whole place the way a stranger might. It had been a long time since a stranger was out here. Roy didn’t like strangers much.

They were set well back from the road. At the end of the driveway, where Griffin had left the Escalade, was the barn. One of the barn doors stood open. Inside were compressors, welding equipment, an engine lift, and a beat-up flatbed truck. The barn was where they did most of their work, but

the overflow spilled out onto the lawn. Only it wasn't really a lawn, just bare patches alternating with weeds. A bumper lay here; a car door, there. Back by the fence, a minivan, stripped of its wheels, looked more like a crushed shoe box.

A long time ago, back when Griffin's dad had had a job, on weekends he also worked as a mechanic, among other things. Then he got fired and one thing led to another, to the point where TJ and Jimbo were employees, if you could call them that. A chop shop sounded kind of organized, like an assembly line of thieves. They were anything but. Take a bunch of guys with no women around, throw in cars and car parts and machinery and tools, and you had the recipe for a real mess.

People out in these parts didn't think twice about leaving a rusting pickup up on blocks in the driveway or hauling an old washing machine out to the long grass. Griffin and Roy's place just looked a little worse than most. But in case the law came looking, most of the operation was out of sight, out of mind. The barn hid their activities from prying eyes, even from the air. And once a vehicle had been stripped of all usable parts, TJ or Jimbo would eventually get out the tractor and bury the skeleton out back.

West of the barn was the house. It was a few decades newer than the barn, but it had needed painting ever since Griffin could remember. Now the paint curled up in long, rusty red strips.

Behind the house rose forested hills where nobody noticed

if you shot a deer – in season or not. A few hardwoods were sprinkled among the evergreens, brilliant orange and red in the fall but bare and gaunt now. But mostly the forest was rich green pine and Douglas fir. Somebody owned the land, the government or maybe some rich guy back East. Griffin had heard it both ways. But whoever owned it never came around, so Griffin thought of it as his own personal forest.

Cheyenne caught her toe on a crankshaft and stumbled into Griffin. “Sorry, sorry,” he mumbled. It was hard to look ahead and think what might trip her up. Feeling contrite, he steered her around broken gears, a windshield wiper, and a gas cap.

They reached the front steps. At the last minute, he remembered to say, “Step up.”



TURNING SECRETS INTO WEAPONS

The house smelled funky, like mold, bacon grease, and cigarettes. The floors were bare. Cheyenne could tell by the sound of their footsteps that they were made of wood, not tile or linoleum. She shuffled her feet so that she could hear the echo from the walls. The rooms sounded small.

She wished her hands were free so she could protect her belly. She kept hitting her shins, knees, and stomach on furniture and other unknown obstacles. Sometimes she could sense things ahead of her, but the way Griffin was hustling her forward, she didn't have time. Her body was already mapping this house in bruises. If only Phantom were here. Griffin was terrible at guiding her.

Griffin. She held the name close to her, like a gift. His name was Griffin. There was a kid at her high school named

that, a senior. But the name wasn't that common. Once she got free – and she would get free, she had to – his name might be just the clue the police needed to find them and lock them all up.

Then *Griffin* would be the one stumbling with his hands bound behind him.

And there was Griffin's dad. What kind of a dad thought it was okay for his kid to be out stealing cars? Cheyenne thought she had heard one of the two other men say his name before they left. Ray? No, Roy, that was it. At least she thought so.

Cheyenne resolved to keep whatever secrets she could. Maybe, just maybe, she could turn them into weapons. Take her blindness, for example. A lot of blind people weren't totally blind. Including Cheyenne. Cheyenne could see a little out of her left eye, but Griffin didn't know that.

The doctors had called what had happened to her a contracoup injury. The blow had hit her forehead, but the damage had happened when her brain bounced off the back of her skull.

Even three years later, Cheyenne still remembered snippets of what the doctors had said standing over her hospital bed. Her dad had sat by her and cried. Cheyenne had had a tube down her throat, so she couldn't talk. There were more tubes in her nose and arms. She had kept her eyes closed and pretended to be asleep while they explained what the injuries were and what they meant.