

THE CAPTIVE

THERESA WISE



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CHARACTERS

LIVES IN AUBURN WASHINGTON WEST OF THE CASCADE
MOUNTAIN RANGE:

Beth Farell – one of three women held hostage

Emily Jacobsen – a hostage

Kathrin Reilley – a hostage

Nick Thoren - kidnapper

Edward J. Farell Esquire – Beth's father

Carla Farell – Beth's mother

Ashley – new friend of Kathrin's

LIVES IN OKANOGAN COUNTY, WASHINGTON EAST OF THE
CASCADE MOUNTAIN RANGE:

Glenn McKlain – a reluctant kidnapper

Luke Lazaro – kidnapper and Glenn's adopted father

John Decker – kidnapper

LIVES IN MALAWI, AFRICA:

Andrew Powell – missionary

Amie- a three-year-old orphan

PART ONE

1. The Bank

Auburn, Washington

You have *no* idea what trouble you could get into.” Beth’s dad fumed. “Your Aunt Laura once lived in Seattle. Look what happened to her. She’s never been the same. You want that?”

The anxious suffering in her dad’s voice blared in Beth’s ear in spite of the din of traffic a few yards away.

“Yeah, Dad, I get it. But it doesn’t mean I’ll be raped like your sister was.”

“Dad, you’ve kept me from the world my *whole* life. I’m a college freshman now. I want to live. So I’m going with Emily to that concert tonight in Seattle.”

“Not as long as you’re living under my roof, you’re not. I forbid you.”

Beth sighed inwardly. Not again. Didn’t he ever get tired of that same old trick? “You can’t stop me, not even with one of your fancy court orders.” She gritted her teeth to keep her temper in check. “Don’t worry, Dad, I’ll be fine. See you tomorrow. Love ya. Bye.”

Her dad’s ring tone started in before Beth had stuffed the cell into her pocket. She groaned. “How long will he keep this up?”

Harsh voices jerked Beth’s attention back to her surroundings, overriding the cell’s insistent ring. She

ignored it and scanned the bank's parking lot. The noise didn't come from the empty cars. Nor was the source her friend Emily, who kept digging around in her Subaru next to Beth.

Her eyes followed the sound to an adjacent alley between the bank and a little coffee shop. The noon-day sun—peeking through gathering clouds—shed light on a struggle between four middle-school boys and a smaller-framed blond kid with a patch on his shirt.

Beth frowned and moved a few steps closer to get within earshot. Before she cleared the lot, one of the boys hooked the trembling, harried-looking teen's arms from behind. Fist curled, another hulking bully stuck his fat nose in the defenseless young man's face, whom Beth dubbed "Patch."

"Stop ... talking ... to my girl," the bully shouted.

"I promise I won't talk to her anymore." Patch's weak voice shook. "Just please, let me go."

The ruffian threw his fist into his captive's stomach. Patch sucked in a sharp breath and doubled over. His knees collapsed.

"Now you'll never forget." Bully rubbed his knuckles. "You're a loser man, and your dad's a loser jail-bird." His voice changed to a high squeak. "Tweet, tweet, jail-bird."

The gang burst out laughing.

Brats! The heat of anger flushed Beth, but at the same time shakiness weakened her legs. *Don't be such a coward.* She scolded herself inwardly. *Go over and help him. But what if they have a knife?* She cringed, torn with indecision. *Four to one odds aren't good. Besides—*

"Geesh! Finally." Emily's crabby tone broke into Beth's teeter-tottering thoughts. "I found my debit card. It must

have fallen out of my purse onto the floorboard.”

Beth turned and motioned her friend over. “C’mere! Quick! A couple of punks are beating up on some poor kid.” She ran back, grabbed Emily by the arm, and tugged her along.

“Wha—”

“We’ve got to help that kid,” Beth insisted. “It won’t take a minute. You have the ultimate distraction, a perfect model’s figure in a skimpy outfit. Ha! I’ve got nothing.”

“Yeah, you do. You’ve got pretty, long, brown hair. I like how the sun brings out your red highlights.”

“Thanks, but everything about me is average, right down to my plain, brown eyes ...” Her voice trailed off. Talking had kept Beth’s fears at bay, but now they were close to the alley. The bullies were still at it. The underweight teen sagged, held up by one of the boys.

Beth’s mind swirled with visions of a knife and blood spewing. Her heart hammering, dizziness overpowered her. She stopped short. Emily bumped into her.

The mean kid pinched Patch’s nose and yanked up his head. “Aw, let’s go. He’s *scared*.” He mimicked the voice of a toddler. “Poor baby, he probably messed his pants.”

Another round of laughter. The pimple-faced teen let go of his captive.

Bully drew his foot back and rammed it into Patch’s shin. Patch yelped and curled into the fetal position. The delinquents strutted away like proud, young roosters.

Patch struggled to his feet, held his stomach, and limped down the alley.

“I’m such a chicken.” Beth’s head dropped, while keeping her eyes on Patch as he hobbled away. “Why didn’t I do something? Why do I always freeze up? Why can’t I

think of the other person and forget myself?”

“That middle-school stuff happens all the time. You think you can rescue every kid?” Emily’s tone sharp, she combed her fingers through her blond hair. “C’mon. Now we have only twenty minutes before class.” She started speed-walking toward the bank. “Is this the first time you’ve run into a bully?”

“No, I have a brother. Just kidding. He’s a good boy, mostly. Yeah, I believe this is my first time seeing actual bullies.”

“Your first? Where have you been? Oh yeah,” Emily rolled her eyes. “You were homeschooled, never got to go to a *real* school.”

Beth had only known Emily a few weeks, but she’d never criticized homeschooling before. She hoped her other classmates didn’t feel the same. If anyone could find fault with her lack of experience, it would be Beth.

“Hey, it’s a real school. My mom is a tough teacher.” Beth’s voice fell. “But yeah, guess I am a real-life Rapunzel.”

“How weird is *that* in today’s world? Your parents never let you go to a prom or—”

“I went to dance classes, and I worked at Dad’s law office. That’s worldly exposure big time. I remember once we—”

“*Out of order?*” Emily yelled through clenched teeth.

Beth peeked over her friend’s shoulder. Sure enough, a sign covered the ATM screen. “Come on, Em. Let’s go inside. We’ve got time.”

They stood in line five long minutes. Emily huffed and crossed her arms. The line moved an inch. Her huffing turned into foot-tapping. “We are so going to be late.”

Like that’ll move the teller along?

A baby squalled two places ahead of them.

“Geesh! Can’t that mother keep her kid quiet?”

Whoa, embarrassing! Beth had no idea Emily could get pissed so easily.

A brunette standing in the next row over stopped texting and glanced at Emily. She didn’t look judgmental, only curious. Her slight figure exaggerated her thick mop of pixie-cut, dark-brown hair. Narrow, dark eyes stood out in her fine-boned face, complimented by her light complexion. She looked part East Asian. Very cute in her red blouse.

Right then, the bank doors flew open. From behind her, Beth heard people scuffling and urgent-sounding voices. More latecomers? *Are they in as much of a hurry as Em?* She hid a smile as the thought of “teller wars” came to mind. *Which line will move faster?*

Beth turned ... and froze. Her smile vanished.

An average-sized man wearing a ski mask barged through the glass doors and shoved his way past the bystanders. Directly behind him another man stood by the door ... fatter than the first, wearing an identical ski mask.

Beth gasped. “A gun! He has a gun.” Her eyes widened. Adrenalin surged.

Before Beth could wrap her mind around what was happening, a skinny third man with a cowboy hat burst in. His clothing hung on him. A red bandana hid the lower half of his face.

Another gun! Beth’s heart jumped into her throat.

A woman’s terrified shriek jolted Beth back to her senses. *Run!* But panic paralyzed her. Screaming and confusion broke out everywhere. Two teller lines collided into each other trying to escape.

The fat man blocked them. “Everyone on the floor!” he rasped. “*Now!*” His gloved hand swept the room, pointing the deadly weapon over everyone’s head.

Commotion exploded. The crowd dropped to their knees. Beth joined them, trembling. Emily fell beside her. They sprawled out on the cold, tiled floor.

Whimpers echoed across the room. Beth felt them rise within her. She closed her eyes and swallowed, willing her sobs to stay inside.

A pistol’s earsplitting blast shattered above them. In a fit of hysteria, Beth flinched and clutched at Emily. Others screeched, curled into balls, and covered their heads. The sulfur stench of gun smoke assaulted Beth’s nose. She trembled uncontrollably. *Oh, God, help us!*

“Y’all shut your mouth!” The first masked man raised his gun high. “And don’t you move, or I’ll start spraying bullets.” He snorted, teeth filling in the gap in the skier’s mask.

Terrorizing people amuses him! Beth’s body grew hot with anger, masking her wobbliness for a moment. She turned her head toward Emily. “Whoa, he’s nasty, but Fatty and Skinny—”

Skinny peered at her.

Beth closed her eyes *and* her mouth. A second later, she cracked her eyes open again.

The man she’d labeled “Nasty” stalked to the counter, jabbed his weapon at a bank teller, and handed her a cloth sack. “Doll Face, give me all the money in the drawers, and you best not piddle around.” The gun never wavered.

The pale teller’s hands shook.

In a calm, friendly voice, Nasty ordered the teller at the far window, “And you, Hun, give me all the cash in the

vault. Y'all got ninety seconds or"—he swung his weapon on a frightened-looking, preteen girl—"Precious gets it. Just so ya know, the countdown has begun."

"No! Please!" the hysterical mother pleaded. Tears gushed. "She's only a child. You—"

"Now didn't I tell you to shut your mouth?" His voice thundered even though it was expressed with an unruffled tone.

Heart racing, Beth studied the thieves again. Skinny began to cough. His face reddened. Wrinkles and a stooped posture betrayed his age. He looked like an elderly cowboy out of the Old West, except for his coveralls and sunglasses, which she noticed all three robbers were wearing. Fatty still guarded the door.

Beth's mind numbed. It all seemed surreal, like an illusion. Yet, here she was cowering in the midst of a real-life bank robbery. She couldn't believe what her eyes and ears told her. She shuddered.

"Time's up. Gimme the money." Nasty tore the sacks from the tellers' hands and hiked them over his shoulder.

The guard, Fatty, suddenly came to life. "You're coming with me." He reached down, grabbed the Asian brunette's arm, and jerked her to her feet. She cried out in terror. He snatched her phone from her grip, tossed it aside, and pulled her through the doors. Her little body struggled to keep upright.

Fatty stopped and turned toward the clerks, his thick voice still raised. "I figure you alerted the cops already. Tell them if anyone fires at us, tries to follow us, or blocks us in any way, we'll shoot one hostage at a time. Tell 'em, or you'll be responsible for a trail of dead girls."

Women cried out in terror, cringing on the floor.

Beth's heart plummeted when Skinny seized Emily's arm. "C'mon, let's go." He yanked her up and dragged her along with him.

"He's taking Emily!" Beth cried out. "Somebody help her."

Nobody moved except the thieves.

Emily went without a fight.

When light reflected off the weapon jabbing her ribs, Beth understood why. Only one thought screamed at her. She might regret it, but she had to *do something*. She couldn't just lie there and watch him take her friend. She'd let those teen bullies get away with their cruelty, but not this time!

Heart pounding, Beth leaped to her feet and slammed into the old man. She hammered him and tugged at his arm with all her might. "Let go of her! You can't take her."

Obviously caught by surprise, the bony cowboy tried to fight Beth off, but he fell into a coughing fit.

My chance! She grabbed Emily and ripped her free.

An iron grip tightened around Beth's forearm until it ached. Something cold and hard poked sharply between her ribs. A gun. She slumped, defeated, and let go of Emily.

"Hun, if you're so anxious to go along, then let's go." Nasty ordered in a cordial tone.

"No, please," Beth begged.

Nasty, smelling of musky aftershave, forced Beth to move forward. Skinny had regained control of Emily.

"Let go of me. Ow! You're hurting my arm. Let go." Tears stung Beth's eyes.

"Gimme your phone."

She pulled it from her pocket. The gunman grasped her cell and smashed it on the floor. Then he crammed his gun deeper into her flesh. "Move it, girl!"

Beth moaned. She had no choice but to do what he said. Her life meant nothing to him. Terror gripped her throat; her body went rigid like a stone statue. She strained to move her stiff legs. Soon, she couldn't breathe or fight or make a sound.

Beth felt the sensation of shrinking deep inside herself—to hide, like a turtle withdrawing into the safety of its shell. The tumult around her slowed and became a blur. A dream. Faintly, she saw them walk out of the brown-brick structure. The buzzing in her head muted the shouts. Close to fainting, she could hear her heartbeat. Now, instead of rigid, her extremities felt weak and helpless.

Got to fight. Breathe.

The buzzing soon ceased, and her mind cleared. It was all horribly real. Fatty propelled the terrified brunette toward a white SUV. She stumbled, slammed against the vehicle, and whimpered.

Nasty threw the sacks into the back of the same vehicle. With his grip clenched around Beth's arm, he opened the back door on the driver's side. Then he signaled with a slight twitch of his head. "Get in."

Beth hesitated. *If I get into this car, I may never see my city, my home, or my family again.* Tears blurred her vision. "No. Please, don't do this."

A gloved hand shoved her into the SUV. Her knees buckled, and she crumpled onto the back seat.