

IDENTITY LOST

THERESA WISE



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THE TAKEN TRILOGY: *The Captive; Identity Lost; Trapped*

CHARACTERS

Emily Jacobsen—a young woman searching for her real father; lives in Auburn, WA

CHARACTERS LIVING IN WENATCHEE, WA, ON THE EAST
SIDE OF THE CASCADE MOUNTAIN RANGE

Todd & Dawn Jacobsen—Emily's mother and stepfather

Mia—Emily's younger sister; married to Brandon

Dillon—Emily's younger brother

Detective Flinn—an investigator of a murder in the family

Brooke and Shelby—Emily's school friends

Travis Campbell—Emily's long-time friend

John and Sheila Campbell—Travis's parents

CHARACTERS LIVING UP ICICLE RIVER ROAD NEAR
LEAVENWORTH, WA, IN THE EASTERN CASCADE FOOTHILLS

Phil & Trudy Meier—Emily's grandparents

CHARACTERS LIVING IN KENT, WA, ON THE WEST SIDE OF
THE CASCADE MOUNTAIN RANGE

Zach Malloch—a pilot

Danielle Murry—an old friend of Emily's parents

Nick Thoren—one of Emily's abductors from four years ago

1. Is It Paranoia?

Note: *Identity Lost* is a stand-alone story. However, for those who are familiar with the first book of The Taken Trilogy, this story opens just before the final events in *The Captive*.

Wednesday, November 22
Kent, Washington

Emily crossed the parking lot in an early morning drizzle, but something wrong caught her eye. She stopped short, perplexed. A green jeep just like Todd's, her stepdad. Not a big deal except that the two figures sitting in the front seat embraced and kissed like lovers.

She squinted at the jeep, rain tickling her nose. It *couldn't* be her parents. Not here in Kent. No, they lived in Wenatchee, clear on the other side of the mountains. Besides, Mom and Todd wouldn't be kissing like that. No way. They would be arguing.

Must be someone else. Still, Emily had to know, so she moved closer. A Navy Crest displayed with pride in a corner of the jeep's windshield. *It's Todd's jeep, all right.*

Eyebrows drawn together, Emily's mind scrambled to find answers until she stood at the front bumper. Disorientation gave way to sudden coldness. It *was* Todd. But the woman he was with was *not* Mom. Emily's mouth fell open. She stared in disbelief. The couple moved apart far enough for Emily to

recognize the dark-haired woman. Danielle, Mom's old friend! Indignation flamed up and burned Emily's face.

Todd's gaze hit upon Emily, standing before his jeep, glaring at him in the cold morning shower. He stiffened. His lips flattened, and he turned to speak to Danielle.

Emily braced herself when Todd flung open the door and stalked up to her. She was hot with anger, yet shaking with fear, but that didn't matter. Not this time. She dared to go nose to nose with Todd like she'd seen her mother do. "Really? Making out with another woman on Mom's birthday?" Her pitch rose, nails biting into her palms. "And Mom's *friend* of all people. What's *wrong* with you?"

Todd's eyes and veins bulged in his pit-bull broad face. He unleashed a string of curses. "You're no one to talk, you worthless tramp. You've put an ugly stain on our family. You're no daughter of mine, and you will never be."

With bared teeth, Emily tried to hide the brokenness his words inflicted, tried to deny them even.

Hands twice the size of Emily's rammed her shoulders. Her head jerked forward as arms and legs floundered. A parked car behind her broke Emily's fall, but pain shot through her spine and robbed her of breath. She recovered enough to watch Todd strut his gorilla-type body toward his vehicle. Danielle waited in his jeep, touching up her smeared lipstick.

Not caring who heard, Emily shouted her favorite foul description of her stepdad's anatomy, words she'd learned from the master profanity-slinger himself.

A gray-haired woman stopped pushing a shopping cart long enough to shake her head and glare through the mist at Emily.

Emily ignored the stranger's disapproval. Something else pressed her mind. *Is there no end to his wickedness? He doesn't give a*

rip about Mom. “I can’t stand him. I’ve gotta get out of their house.” Emily stomped at a fast pace through shallow puddles to her classic Bronco.

No, I’ve got to be there for my little brother, even if it’s only parttime. To face Todd alone without any reprieve—

She shuddered at the thought. I couldn’t live with myself if something happened to Dillon. C’mon, Emily, you can survive four more years. You’ve learned how to do this. Maybe Dillon will graduate in three. He’s plenty smart like his big sister.

At her prize Bronco, Emily climbed in and fired it up, along with the heater. Its engine idling, she pulled down the sun visor to check her reflection in a mirror. A pretty blonde’s steel-gray eyes glared back at her. *Todd has done nothing but beat and demean me, and now this ... with Mom.*

Her mind flashed back. Todd’s words “worthless tramp, no daughter of mine” struck like a viper, its poison tearing its way deep into her, forever damaging. *What kind of person says that? And why? What’s wrong with me?* Her eyes burned. “No, I am not going to let him get to me,” she vowed, bashing the steering wheel with her fist.

Pain transported her out of self-pity. She dug through her purse to refresh the lipstick and then fluffed her mid-length hair. But she had to lose that cold, hard expression she saw in the mirror. Red lips forced a smile. *Ick, phony. That’s Todd’s gig. I don’t wanna be like him. Really, all I want is a better life than this. Can’t I have that?*

From her door mirror, Emily became aware of two men with spiked mohawks watching her from underneath a nearby gas station’s canopy. *Wait. I’ve seen those freaks ... a few days ago when I walked out of the store.*

In her mind’s eye, the taller one stood with arms crossed, bearded chin jutting, and eyes locked on hers with a “be afraid

of me” look that day. The memory incited her scalp to prickle like it had the first time.

Feeling vulnerable, Emily’s restless fingers rushed to press the door lock. *Clunk*. The metallic sound gave her some comfort. *What’s going on with those creeps? Why are they watching me?*

With a quick scroll on her phone and a tap on Jasmine’s name, Emily barked, “Where are you? Can you hurry?”

“Keep your panties on, girl. I’ll be right there,” Jasmine said in her typical singsong dramatic way. “I’m checking out.”

“I’ll drive to the front of the store and pick you up.”

Once Jasmine hopped into the Bronco, Emily asked her to lock her door, and then she pulled into traffic.

Jasmine’s long black braids with bobbles swished and *clacked* when she turned to Emily. “How come you’re all paranoid, girl? Locking the doors?”

“Just do it.” Emily shot her a firm glare.

“Oookay.”

Insides still jittery, Emily described that morning’s ordeal.

“Are you paranoid because you’re still messed up from being kidnapped four years ago?” Jasmine asked.

Emily kept watch on the road, but she felt Jasmine doing visual brain surgery on her. “You think I’m overreacting about those freaks?”

“Oh, yeah! Before you were kidnapped, you would’ve flipped those clowns off and went on your merry way.”

“I don’t feel threatened by the kidnappers, except for one,” Emily said with more courage than she felt. “The old guy’s dead, most likely. The one called Decker is in prison, and the third kidnapper—Glenn—was a good guy. He was forced to help the others evade the law. But the worse guy, *Nick* threatened to kill me because I smashed his hand and testified against him. I told you he escaped. Remember?”

"I remember." Squinting at Emily, Jasmine crossed her arms with exaggeration. "And I told *you* I'd kick butt and take names, didn't I?"

"Yeah, you did." Emily glanced at her friend with a glint in her eye. "You can't be my personal bodyguard all the time. You've got a life and a job." She stared out at traffic. "I wonder if Beth or Kathrin had any more run-ins with Nick."

"They're students who were held hostage with you, right?"

"Yeah."

Jasmine bent over, reaching toward the mat. "Hey, what's this?" She picked up a yellow piece of lined paper, unfolded it, and studied it.

"What is it?" Emily asked. No answer. "I don't recognize it." Still no response. "Is there something written on it?"

"Oh, yeah." Obviously, the paper had captured Jasmine's full attention.

"Well, are you going to read it or what?" Emily snapped.

"I noticed it because it's got this crazy thing going on. A creepy drawing of Satan on the outside." The devil artwork showed up in front of Emily's face as two black fingers held it up. "Vile, huh?"

"No kidding."

"Whoever wrote this is in bad need of a penmanship class. I think it says, 'You're going to enjoy seeing me again.'"

Emily's stomach grew rock hard. *Could it be Nick? Or am I just being paranoid?* Wide eyes darted to the rearview mirror for fear someone might be following them.

"This window's open a crack. Someone could've slipped a paper through there. But a stranger wouldn't know which ride is yours." Jasmine turned to Emily. "Hey, girlfriend, you got yourself a secret admirer."

"What degenerate would sketch a creepy devil and leave

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me in the dark about who he is?”

Jasmine fluttered her lips. “Danged if I know.”

“Maybe if he’d left off the devil ... Naw, it’s too weird. I gotta get my pistol repaired.”

“Gonna shoot your admirer?” One black eyebrow rose.

“You nurses need *something* to do,” Emily said with a sarcastic, sideways glimpse at her friend.

“We don’t need more stuff like that. We’re up to our eyeballs in it already.”

The Bronco pulled up alongside the hospital where Jasmine worked. The passenger door creaked at Jasmine’s shove. “Thanks for giving me a hitch. I’ve got a ride home for tonight.”