

Battered

Hope

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Chapter 1

The silence was deafening. The only sounds I heard were coming from inside my head. I could hear the blood rushing through my veins from the palpitations of my heart. My sweater was moving to an uneven rhythm. I had to keep telling myself to remain calm. I must not appear flustered or guilty. I tried taking deep breaths to slow down the pace of my heart which took every ounce of my strength and fortitude. I grabbed my knees with both hands to stop them from shaking. But that didn't seem to help, and fear prevented me from thinking rationally.

How had this Saturday become so different from any other? Saturdays were reserved for house cleaning. That had been drilled into me since childhood. "Don't make plans because Saturdays are for cleaning." Always were – always would be. Sundays were for relaxing but Saturdays meant cleaning. All these years later, I still kept Saturdays for cleaning.

The day started like any other Saturday. No one could have guessed that my life was about to change forever. How could one fleeting moment, one microsecond of a person's life make such a difference? If only that moment could be snatched back from eternity, erased, but that was impossible.

It was one of those days when I felt grateful to be alive. It was bright and sunny and the air was fresh from a light snowfall the night before. I cleaned the house with fury to have everything in order before going to the airport to pick up my husband, Paul. He had been in England for a week on a speaking tour and I was so excited about seeing him and hearing all about the trip. Our four-year-old son, Jason, was helping with the business of the day getting ready for Daddy's return.

The next thing I knew I was in the police station, alone, and scared. The holding room was like a phone booth with no windows. I was sweltering under a choking fog of body odor and stale cigarette smoke. Nausea swept over me and I had to force myself to take a breath.

“You wait here,” a man said gruffly. Then the door was slammed shut and locked. That sound resonated through me and I felt as though my life was ending. It sent shivers up my spine and made me shudder. I could not explain my emotions or why I was so scared because I wasn’t even sure what was going on. My mind raced. It was an emotional whiplash between “why” and “what if.” What was going to happen? Why were they holding me? What if they found Paul? What would happen to my son? The questions wouldn’t stop and I could not think clearly. I felt sick to my stomach completely oblivious to the fact that deep within my belly, new life was growing.

Earlier that day, Jason and I picked Paul up at the airport as planned and headed home. We had lots of plans for that evening and the next few days. Then I was arrested and restrained by rude, pushy, border police. They said they were holding me for questioning but I didn’t know why. The only thing I knew I should do was to pray, and I wasn’t sure how to pray in such a situation.

A gentle, yet firm, voice inside me was saying, "Admit to nothing. Only tell them your name and address. Say nothing else. Be careful, because they will try to trip you up." I did not understand this, but the voice got louder and louder until I knew I had to obey. I didn't know what was about to happen, but I knew I had to get through this one moment to get back home with my husband and son. If only I could snap my fingers and make this all go away.

We had been home from the airport long enough to take off our jackets when the doorbell rang. I looked at Paul, only to see him flee through the back door without his jacket or shoes. The bell rang again. I had to answer it. The doorknob was cold and slippery and my hands felt weak. I kept telling myself to get control and appear unruffled.

I opened the door and three plainclothes officers filed in, showing me their badges. One of them deliberately shoved me out of the way. I felt violated and terrified. Another one asked me my name and read me my rights before saying, "You have brought an illegal alien across the border, and we're going to hold you until you tell us where he is."

Our Doberman stationed herself between Jason and me. She was extremely agitated and showing her teeth. One of the officers pulled out his pistol and held it in position to shoot our pet right in front of my son. Things were spinning out of control. I was scared and getting angry. I couldn't believe what was happening. I felt lightheaded like I might pass out. The man lowered his gun and began speaking in a loud, condescending tone, asking if I had any weapons in the house.

Jason exclaimed, "You want weapons? I got weapons!" They followed him into his bedroom, all three with pistols drawn, as my innocent unsuspecting four-year-old opened his bottom dresser drawer and exposed all his "weapons." The three towering men looked into the drawer. One had the gall to search through the toys in great anticipation of finding something illegal. My son beamed with pride to have real policemen interested in his plastic revolvers and holster. If I hadn't been so scared, I might have laughed.

In a small, locked room from where I found myself a short time later, I could hear the police on the other side of the closed door. It was reporting an ongoing sniffer dog search through the woods behind my house. After all the years he'd spent hunting with his father, now Paul was the prey. The 40 acres were dense, dark, and swampy. I wondered if Paul had watched me being shoved into the patrol car. He would be frozen out there, in only a short-sleeve shirt. I was so worried because I didn't know what was going to happen. Would I ever see him again? I didn't even get to hug him or kiss him goodbye. I bit my tongue to stop a tear from running down my cheek, trying to appear unflustered.

With no findings to report, the police were getting frustrated. Through the closed door, I heard one say, "Those dogs are useless mutts sometimes."

I smiled to myself, feeling a moment of temporary relief. Finally, someone opened the door to my hellhole and said "Follow me."

I had to concentrate on not tripping as my legs were the consistency of Jell-O. I told myself I must not appear weak. I was led into a dingy office that smacked of Government Issue paint. The entire room lacked color. There was a distinct odor of mold. A glance around the room showed nothing personal, not even a plant. The desk was covered in files, and I could not help but wonder if they had information about me in one. I demanded to know what they had done with Jason.

“You better talk and talk fast lady if you want to get home to that kid of yours anytime soon,” one of them said.

Even under that threat, I knew I must listen to the gently nagging voice inside my head telling me to “say nothing.” The pressure was building and the voice was getting louder. I did have the presence of mind to ask, “Don’t I get one phone call at least?”

Reluctantly, one of the officers handed me a phone book. I randomly picked an attorney from the yellow pages and dialed the number, trying to keep my hand steady, so I would not show my nervousness. The lawyer said the same thing as my inner voice, adding, "Be careful what you sign." I wondered why he'd mentioned signing something.

The questions were quick and repetitive. "Where is your husband?" "Where did he go?" "Do you realize you have broken the law?" "Why did you bring him here?" "Where has he been?"

The interrogation continued but I stood my ground and did not waver. Amazed at my courage, I had a strong sense that I must obey my inner voice. After ten or fifteen minutes, another officer entered the room. He looked unkempt in a wrinkled suit. His tie was crooked and didn't match his shirt. I found it odd I should notice something that insignificant but it gave me a little more courage. He bent down and whispered something into another officer's ear. It seemed they were going to let me go.

“Read this release form and sign on the bottom,” he told me.

I sensed irritation in his voice and assumed he was upset that they had to release me. I looked the form over. It said I was being released for lack of evidence. I was about to sign it when I felt compelled to turn it over. At the bottom of the page, in print almost too small to read was a statement admitting my guilt.

I could not believe that such deception would be used in America. I stood up and threw the paper across the desk. “What kind of a game is this?” I raged. “There is no way I’m signing this form!” My adrenalin was rushing, which gave me the audacity I needed to hold my head up high and walk out of there.

It was only about a mile to my house and walking gave me time to think. My hands were quivering, my stomach ached and I needed to go to the bathroom. I knew that if I could get home I would be able to think clearly.

The tears flowed easily now and I tried to keep them at bay. I had to keep my head clear. I had to figure out what to do. Should I get Jason? They had taken him to daycare, and I felt he was better off there than seeing me in this state. I didn't know if I should stay at home and wait for the phone to ring or start driving around. Would I be followed? There were no answers – only a lot of questions.

I was still very frightened. I was in a cold sweat and my hands were shaking. I tried to button up my sweater but I was all thumbs. Every time I took a breath, my chest hurt. The cold air was helping to clear my head, but I didn't know of anyone I could call or trust.

I had no idea where Paul was, what had happened to him, or how we ended up in this situation. I later learned that Paul could see our home from his crouched position in the woods and watched closely as a figure in the back bedroom kept motioning him to move forward. He assumed it was me, so he obeyed. However, I didn't do that, and other than the officers looking at Jason's toys, no one was in that back bedroom.

He began his trek through the dense forest with no idea of what he was going to do.

Then he heard the voices. There were several. They were coming closer and his heart momentarily stopped. He held his breath as a German Shepherd approached him. He knew it was over. The chances were slim to none that he would ever escape. The hunter had found his prey and would be duly rewarded. Paul's heart was pounding so fast, he was afraid the dog would sense his fear and attack. Oddly, the dog only sniffed Paul and relieved himself on a bush.

Then the strangest thing happened. The dog let out a slight yelp and jumped back like he was being slapped by something unseen, and quickly ran away. The voices diminished and then they were gone. Paul's relief was overwhelming and he felt weak as his adrenalin slowed down, but the task at hand was to find safety. It was not safe to go back home. Now what? Go where?

What was happening on the home front? Then he remembered the figure in the back bedroom motioning him to move onward and so he did.

Nothing in my upbringing had prepared me for what was ahead.



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