



PinPoint

A HUNTED
Bonus Short Story

Cheryl Rainfield

PinPoint: A HUNTED Bonus Short Story

By Cheryl Rainfield

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Books by the Author

Cheryl Rainfield

SCARS (WestSide Books, 2010).

Kendra must face her past and stop hurting herself before it's too late

ISBN: 978-1934813324

An ALA 2011 Top 10 Quick Picks for Reluctant Readers; on ALA's Rainbow List Biography; a Governor General Literary Award Finalist (Canada), and an ALA Stonewall Book Award Nominee.

HUNTED (WestSide Books, Dec 02, 2011)

Caitlyn, a telepath on the run from government troopers, must choose between saving herself or saving the world

ISBN: 978-1934813621

C. A. Rainfield

Dragon Speaker: The Last Dragon (HIP Books, 2010)

Jacob is the only one who can hear—and save—the last dragon.

ISBN: 978-1897039465

SkinWalkers: Walking Both Sides (HIP Books, 2011)

Claire is part human and part Skinwalker. How does she choose which side to be on?

ISBN: 978-1926847153

PinPoint:

A HUNTED Bonus Short Story

Voices screech at me, grating through my mind, making it hard to hear what Ms Edwards is saying. . . . *doesn't like me any more. . . when will this class end?. . . can't believe she snubbed me like that. . .*

I feel trapped in the small classroom, with the hot, stuffy June air pressing down on my lungs, and everyone's mind-voices louder this late in the day, with people eager to escape. I lean forward in the hard chair, hands flat on the wobbly, pitted desktop, trying to shut everyone else out—everyone but Ms Edwards. It didn't used to be so bad. My talent's always been strong. But lately it's felt like my brain is stripped bare, others' thoughts gouging in like hail.

I focus on Ms Edwards, on her kind eyes, her pleasing voice, the way she looks at each of us when she talks, and gradually her words start filtering through. "What do you think her body language is telling us?" she asks, tapping the photo of the frightened woman on the smartboard.

I let the others answer, write down the things that make sense in my notebook—afraid, mistrustful, watchful. I have to do well enough that I don't stand out, but not so well that teachers pay attention to me. So I resist grabbing everything I hear from Ms Edwards' mind and copying that down. It's hard to focus, any way, with Alex only a few seats ahead of me; I keep wanting to look at the tight curls of his hair, at the slope of his broad shoulders. Keep feeling his rich, deep laughter reverberate through me, though he's not the one who's speaking. I can't believe I've fallen in love with a Normal. But I have.

I drag myself back to Ms Edwards' voice. It's hard to focus; my head hurts fiercely. Even my eyes ache. And the incessant voices of my classmates keep cutting through my concentration. . . . *bored, bored, bored. . . don't know why she. . . I'm gonna get her back. . .*

I sit bolt upright. Ms Edwards glances at me, and I try to look thoughtful. The menace, the jealousy in that last mind-voice—that was Becca. She seems to have a hate-on for most people, but especially for Paras, or anyone she suspects of being a Para.

I look around the room, but I already know—she's not in this class. But she's somewhere close by. I reach toward the vibrating anger.

Outside in the hall. Waiting for someone. For one of us. . . . *Gonna get her good. . .*

Her hatred is like toxic sludge filling my mind, making it hard to think. The pain increases, like my mind is being burned. The room shimmers around me.

I drop my pen, reaching for my head. No. I snatch my pen back up. *Blend in. Don't call attention to myself.*

Whoever Becca is aiming for is in trouble. I've got to help them.

Slowly, carefully, I open my mind up to Becca's. Rage pours into me like burning lava. . . . *said that about my mom. . . just wait. . . gonna make it look like she's a pre-cog. . . get someone to finger her. . . she'll never know what hit her. . . think she's a Para, any way. . .*

I feel sick. Becca knows what will happen if she accuses someone. She's seen it firsthand. The ParaTroopers storming in to arrest, guns drawn. The Para losing her home, her belongings, her family and everything she loves, to become a Para-slave—a government tool. So much grief, fear, and pain—and still Becca's doing this.

My breathing grows shallow. I've got to find out who Becca's after. And how she plans on pulling this off. To set someone up as a pre-cog, able to predict the future—that's not easy to

do. I wrap myself in her thoughts. I can't ask overtly who Becca's pinpointing, or she'll know a Para is in her head. I've got to phrase this just right. "*She might be a Normal, but she looks like —*"

. . . *A skank!* . . .

Okay. That didn't work. Ms Edwards pauses, looking at me, and I scribble in my notebook, trying to look busy.

"Caitlyn?" Ms Edwards says. "What do you think?"

The class turns to look at me, and I realize Ms Edwards has said my name a few times.

Crud. I slip out of Becca's mind, and reach for Ms Edwards. She's worried about me, about the way I seem so preoccupied, even troubled. She wonders if my coming to this school so late in the year is the problem, or if there's something worse. I get a barrage of thoughts about the module we're studying, and then the photo of the woman up on the smartboard.

I clear my throat. "She looks tense. Like she's trying to hide her fear and isn't sure if she's done that."

"Yes!" Ms Edwards nods. "Very good." She turns her attention back to teaching. The class turns away from me and back to her.

I reach for Becca again. She's still there, her rage undulating through her. I've got to get her to be more specific. "*She's the one who—*"

. . . *wears ugly clothes. Like hand-me-downs from her mother.* . . .

I look around the class at each of the girls. Some are wearing hundred-dollar jeans and brand-name tops; I ignore them. Others have jeans that look more battered, skirts and tops that look like bargain clothes—but none of them look like they're from another decade.

I bite my lip. I've got to figure this out. You lose more than your freedom when you become a Para-slave. You lose your family, your safety. You can even lose your life.

Becca thought that the girl might really be a Para. I feel outward in the classroom for the bright energy that other Paras give off. There are three low-level Paras, and one mid-level—three girls and one boy.

That narrows it down—but not enough.

I glance at the classroom clock. Five minutes left to class. I don't have time for this.

Okay. Maybe I'm going about this the wrong way. Maybe I don't need to know who Becca's targeting. Maybe I just need to know what she's planning to do, and stop it. If she's trying to set someone up to look like a pre-cog, then she must be pretending they predicted future events. And the only way she could do that is if she's a pre-cog herself—I feel inside her mind for the spark, and she definitely isn't—or if she's the one who set up those events.

I wrap myself in Becca's thoughts again, in her rage and twisted pain. *"I've got it all planned out," I think. "It's going to work. I've already..."*

... sent Mr. Temple the email using her school account. That was easy. What numbskull uses their own birthday as the password? And I've already defaced the ParaWatch poster. . .

I swallow. That's an offense right there. Most Normals would never dare to do that. Most Normals wouldn't even want to. The ParaWatch helps to keep them in power, after all. But a Para—a desperate, angry Para, or a Normal who's lost a Para family member...might.

I've got to find out where that poster is, and fix it. But first I have to find out what else Becca's planned.

I glance at the classroom clock. Three minutes. I lick my dry lips. *"The poster..."*

... is perfect! Only a Para would deface one. . .

As she thinks that, I see the poster—tattered strips peeling, hanging off like ringlets of hair, and beside it, a poster for the school dance, and just underneath, a fire alarm.

I squint. I know that wall. But where—?

Ah—next to the science lab!

I push down my relief. *“I also...”*

... crammed Todd’s locker with books ready to fall as soon as he opens the door.

Accident number one. He never opens his locker til he’s ready to go home. . . lucky I know his combination . . .

There’s a smug satisfaction laced into her thoughts.

I clench my teeth. How will I ever get to everything on time, to stop it coming true?

I’m not even sure she’s finished. *“I also...”*

... am all set up. It’s easy to twist my ankle; I’ve done it before. But I’ll wait for just the right moment. There’s no way Mr. Temple can ignore three signs all in a row. . .

The bell rings shrilly, breaking my concentration. I stuff my notebook into my backpack and leap out of my seat. I have to stop her!

Ms Edwards sets down her book. “Caitlyn, can I see you for a moment, please?”

“No!” I want to scream. *“Not now! I don’t have the time!”* But I just nod my head. Blend in. Don’t make a scene. But that girl—that poor girl—I don’t know how to warn her.

Students push past me, rushing to escape the walls of the school. Rachel waves to me, “Catch you later!”

Alex walks up the aisle toward me, his brown eyes intent on mine. . . . *Something’s up. . .*
“You okay?” he asks quietly. I get a flash of my own face, pale and stretched, my mouth in a tight, unhappy line.

“No,” I say. “*Becca is setting up a girl—maybe a Para—to be fingered. Now,*” I send to Alex. “*Will you help me?*”

“*Tell me what to do,*” Alex thinks at me.

“Caitlyn,” Ms Edwards says, one eyebrow raised, standing at the end of the room.

I turn reluctantly, and start walking toward her. “*There’s a ParaWatch poster outside the science room,*” I send to Alex. “*It’s been defaced. Can you take it down fast, before Mr. Temple sees it?*”

“*I’m on it,*” Alex thinks at me, jogging out the door.

I reach Ms Edwards and look at her, trying to shove the impatience and fear so far down that she won’t see it.

Ms Edwards smiles at me kindly. “Is everything okay at home, Caitlyn?”

So much for blending in.

“Yes, everything’s good!” I say brightly. Time’s running out. I want to scream.

“*Rachel!*” I send, calling to her as loudly as I can.

Ms Edwards looks even more concerned. “No problems with your parents? Or with the move, with fitting in here?”

“No, no problems,” I tell Ms Edwards, keeping my voice slow and easy. “I like it here a lot. I’m okay, really! I just get these wicked headaches. The doctor says they’re migraines. They’ll go away.”

“*I’m here,*” Rachel thinks at me.

“Oh,” Ms Edwards says, sympathetically. “So that’s why you—” . . . *wear those dark glasses.* . . . “That can be debilitating. I hope you have medication, something to help you through it.”

“Oh, yeah,” I say. “It helps a ton.” *“Rachel—can you do me a favour?” I send. “Todd’s locker is loaded with books ready to hit him when he opens it. Can you stop him somehow? Open it yourself, but be careful? It’s a set up—”* “But when I get a bad headache, it really wipes me out,” I tell Ms Edwards. “I’m sorry I faded in class, but it’s hard to concentrate when it gets bad. Can I go now? I need to rest.”

“Oh, of course,” Ms Edwards says, her voice full of empathy.

“Thank you,” I say, and rush out the door.

“Okay,” Rachel thinks at me, confused. “I can do that.”

“Becca’s trying to frame a Para,” I add. “It’s urgent.”

“I’ll stop him,” Rachel thinks at me firmly.

I stop in the hallway. Some kids are still milling around, talking, but most have gone home. It’s Friday.

“Caitlyn, can you hear me? I got the poster down!” Alex thinks at me. “Most of the pieces, any way. But there’s another one, further down, looks like someone took a marker to it. I’m going to get that one, too.”

“Thank you,” I send faintly. But we’re too late. I know we’re too late. There’s hardly anyone left. Becca wouldn’t just leave after all this planning and elaborate setup without making sure that it all went down the way she wanted. My throat tightens, closing inward. I let another Para down, all because I couldn’t dodge a concerned teacher’s questions. I let a Para be captured, when I could have saved her. The florescent lights flicker and buzz above me, making the hall seem dimmer than it really is.

And then I spot Becca, leaning casually against the lockers, scanning the hallway. At the same time, I feel a shielded flash of sadness and rage, tinged with a metallic scent, and then it’s

gone. Mr. Temple! Somehow I know he's in the stairwell, approaching us, though usually I can't read him at all.

Maybe it's not too late. Maybe Becca wants to make sure Mr. Temple is the one who's convinced, that Mr. Temple is the one whose suspicions are built up, so he'll do the fingering.

I march up to Becca, my hands clenched. "You have too much attitude."

"What?" Becca blinks at me, like she's shocked by the words coming out of my mouth.

"Your homophobia. You make Rachel uncomfortable." Becca's attention wanders, and she scans the halls again. I know she's waiting for Mr. Temple. "And it makes me wonder—why do you go after her so hard? Are you secretly attracted to her?"

Becca launches herself off the lockers, her finger jabbing in my face. "You're the one who's a lesbo lover! You hang around her all buddy buddy while diddling Alex. He's your cover, isn't he? You just leave him alone!"

I feel someone behind me, someone big.

"Becca! Caitlyn!" Mr. Temple's voice booms out.

Becca stops talking and looks up behind me, her mouth opening and closing. I slowly turn around.

Mr. Temple's bald head glistens under the florescent lights. His cold, hard eyes bore into mine. "The school is not your personal gab space. Classes are over. Now, unless you have an extra-curricular activity—" He pauses, waits for us both to shake our heads, "Then I suggest you go home."

"But!" Becca splutters. "But what about the poster? I saw it was ripped—the one by the science lab. You're not just going to—"

Mr. Temple narrows his eyes as he watches her. “Becca,” he says slowly, “You didn’t have anything to do with an email I was sent this afternoon, did you?”

Becca’s eyes widen in false innocence. “Me? No. I didn’t send any email.”

“Mmhmm.” Mr. Temple watches Becca sternly.

I’m glad to see sweat beading on her forehead.

“And how is your ankle today?” Mr. Temple asks her.

“My—ankle?” Becca says, way too surprised.

Mr. Temple’s eyes grow even colder, like ice over a stone. “Becca—fingering Paras is one thing. I’m all for it. You know I encourage it. We need to clean our streets, our schools, of Paras. They are dangerous. But setting a fellow Normal up for an investigation—well, that’s just plain wrong. Not to mention the fine you’d accrue—a fine I’m sure your father wouldn’t willingly pay. You must always remember our true enemy—”

Mr. Temple pauses and looks coldly at me, “Paras,” then back at Becca again. “Not each other. Understood?”

“Yes, Mr. Temple,” Becca says, bowing her head.

Mr. Temple looks at me with frost in his gaze.

“Yes, Mr. Temple,” I squeak out.

“Good,” Mr. Temple says. He nods firmly, then strides down the hall, away from us.

The halls are almost empty.

Becca whirls around on me. “I don’t know what you did, but this isn’t over!” she says, her face so close her spit spatters my cheeks. She stalks off the way Mr. Temple went.

I watch her go, a smile tugging at my lips. I can feel Alex a hallway or two away, getting closer, and Rachel not far behind. Together, we did it. We kept a Para from being captured. It might not be over, not for the long haul, but today it is. Today, we did something wonderful.

Author's Note:

I hope you've enjoyed this short story I wrote to celebrate HUNTED and help get the word out about it. If you enjoyed it, please share the ebook with a friend or let them know where they can download it for free. <http://www.cherylrainfield.com/bookGoodies.php?title=HUNTED>

I hope you'll also consider checking out my novel HUNTED, if you haven't already; it's full of tension, suspense, and hope.

In HUNTED, Caitlyn is a telepath in a world where Paranormal powers are illegal. She is on the run from government troopers. When Caitlyn falls for Alex, a Normal, and discovers dangerous renegade Paranormals, she must choose between staying in hiding to protect herself, or taking a stand to save the world.

The amazing YA authors Adele Griffin, Pam Bachorz, and Cinda Williams Chima all loved HUNTED:

“Spellbound by this one! HUNTED’s got my vote for the sharpest, most thought-provoking fantasy I’ve read in a long time. It’s hard not to fall in love with resilient, defiant Caitlyn, whose voice is as tough as it is pure.

Vividly realized and tightly wound, HUNTED builds tension on the edge of a knife. Its cut-glass style will hook you, and its brave and provocative themes are sure to stir up both emotions and conversation.”

-Adele Griffin, Author of *Where I Want to Be*, National Book Award finalist, Kirkus Best Book, ALA Best Book.

“In this suspenseful parable of prejudice and oppression, Rainfield creates unique, appealing characters we root for until the satisfying end.”

-Pam Bachorz, author of *Candor*, 2011 YALSA Popular Paperback

“With its eerily contemporary themes, *Hunted* will set your pulse to pounding as Caitlyn, struggles to cling to a faith in the basic goodness of humankind in the face of overwhelming evidence to the contrary.”

-Cinda Williams Chima, *The Demon King*, A VOYA Perfect Ten, VOYA's Best Science Fiction, 2011 ALA Best Fiction for Young Adults list

You can read the first six pages of HUNTED starting on the next page.

Bonus Content:

The First 6 Pages of HUNTED

HUNTED

CHAPTER 1

Mom's gaze flicks to the rearview mirror for the thousandth time, like she's afraid someone's tailing us. I don't know how she thinks she can tell in the dark—or with her abilities shut off, leaving her as blind and dull as a Normal.

“There's no one there,” I say, sharp like broken glass, as if I haven't been checking every few minutes myself. As if I haven't been reaching out around us for anything different. Anything off.

The truth is, I think she's right to be nervous. I can't feel anyone watching, can't even sense another Para close by—but they've been shadowing us too quickly lately, like they've found a way to zero in on my talent. But only another Para could do that, and I haven't sensed the metallic bitterness that comes from the Government Paras—the Para-slaves.

Just before we ran, I got the sense that I knew one of the trackers—or that they knew me. That's never happened before. It's too big to think about—one of our own, hunting us. Betraying us, without being forced to.

I glance at Mom. She's clenching the steering wheel so tightly it looks like she might wrench it off its hinges.

I wish she'd swallow her anxiety, act like the parent. The way she was before . . .

Mom loosens her grip on the steering wheel, turns to look at me, her eyes bloodshot. “You're sure no one's following us? Check again, will you, hon? We can't take any chances.”

I grit my teeth, biting back words. I've never gotten used to her asking me to do what she used to on instinct. It's reversed our roles. Now I'm the parent and she's the child, needing protection.

I hunch against the car door, away from her, and open up more to the people around us. Their voices tumble and roll over each other chaotically.

. . . shouldn't have had that third donut . . . can't do this . . . will he be waiting up for me? . . .

I sift through them, feeling for power, for predatory instincts. For anyone focusing on us, when we should just be two anonymous blips in a car.

Nothing.

I reach out farther, toward the people off the highway.

. . .who does he think he is, calling at three in the morning? . . . drank too much damned coffee. . .

Then I reach past the stray thoughts, the people in their cars and beds. I reach for the strongest voices, the ones that vibrate at a higher frequency—the other Paranormals.

I sense a few hundred, maybe more, in the cluster of buildings we're heading toward, but they're fast asleep, their energies focused on dreaming.

I do one more sweep, delving deeper—and that's when I feel it. The pinprick of attention, where there should be none. Someone watching us intently, hiding behind layers of others' thoughts.

I draw my breath in so sharply my chest hurts.

Mom glances at me. I force a smile, try not to let the fear show.

I've got to find out who the watcher is without them sensing me. I visualize a shield of energy around Mom and me. I blend it with the energy of our own bodies, building onto it.

Then I reach out gently for that hidden mind. The layers open up to me slowly—caution, a proprietary protectiveness, and intense concentration.

I laugh as I recognize the familiar mind pattern. My old Para-friend and contact, John. I've never met him in person, but he's helped us get to safety so many times over the years.

"What are you doing, watching us?" I ask, teasingly. *"I told you, we'll be okay."*

I feel him startle—surprised, even annoyed, that I caught him keeping tabs on us. *"If you think I was going to let you face the wolves alone, you're wrong,"* John sends. *"I'll always watch out for you. Besides, you've had too many near misses lately. I want to make sure you're safe this time."*

"Too many near misses" is putting it lightly. Normals used to get suspicious of us—of *me*—once every six months or so. But lately, their target rate has increased—at least with me.

I rub my gritty eyes. *"You sense anyone with a lock on us?"* I ask John.

"No one. But something doesn't feel right. Have you sensed anyone?"

"No." But then I didn't last time, either—until it was almost too late.

"Keep your talent damped down, just in case."

“*You mean try to pass as a Normal,*” I send, disgusted. I can’t stop my gaze from sliding to Mom. She’s worse than a Normal. She’s deadened everything inside her so nothing gets out, nothing gets in. It’s like her brain is a lump of cement, unreadable—instead of energy and thought.

“*It’s better to have a little discomfort and be safe,*” John sends.

“*I know, I know.*” I jerk away from him grumpily, closing our connection. “Nobody’s watching us, except John,” I tell Mom. “Most of the Paras are asleep.”

“Caitlyn Isobel Waters, you know I don’t like you saying ‘Para’; it’s derogatory,” Mom says, her voice as hard and brittle as an icicle.

“It’s Caitlyn Ellis this time, remember?” I say.

“I remember.” Her mouth tightens, then she glances at me, her face softening. “Thank you for making sure we’re safe. I wish *I* could check myself.”

I scowl and slouch down in my seat. *You could if you wanted to. If you tried.*

Mom takes a gulp of coffee. “You want to get some sleep?”

Like I could, knowing they’re after us. And she’ll need me. “That’s all right. It’s not that far now.”

God. We’re always so polite to each other. Like strangers.

I hate that I can’t hear what she’s thinking. I stare out into the murky night, my tinted glasses making it as dark as ink. Even at three in the morning, there are small yellow squares of light, testaments to the people still awake—dealing with crying babies, nightmares, heartache.

People’s thoughts are coming at me faster now, little blips as we pass other cars, the buildings in the distance. We drive beneath a big anti-Para sign flashing its message:

BE A GOOD CITIZEN! REPORT PARA BEHAVIOR

I’ve seen that one so many times my eyes almost glaze over. The next sign is just as common:

DON’T LET THE PARAS TAKE OVER!

REPORT SUSPICIOUS BEHAVIOR

But the sign after that makes me sit up straight:

PARAS ARE UNNATURAL!

THEY DO WHAT NO HUMAN SHOULD

Shivers race down my spine. I've never seen that one before. I haven't seen so many anti-Para signs so close together in a while. I can almost feel the hate closing in around us. Why did John think we'd be safe here? But I know why—it's easier to hide in a city.

My eyes ache and my body's heavy with exhaustion. I try to focus on the rhythmic thrum of our tires on the road, the whisper of classical music from the speakers, the clickclick of the turn signal as Mom changes lanes, but the Normals' mind-voices keep growing until they're a faceless roar.

We pass a ParaTrooper outpost, the building lit up in the dark, the barbed wire along the top of the fence gleaming like bloody teeth. I avert my gaze fast, as if they'll feel me looking. If they have a Government Para on staff, they might. Paras are forced to do the government's bidding against their will.

To protect us, I build the shield up around Mom and me again, gritting my teeth with the effort. I'm so tired that every little thing drains me.

Mom pats my knee. "We'll be okay, Cait. You'll see."

"Sure." She says the same thing every time—but we're still running.

Mom sighs. "It won't always be like this, honey. Someday, we won't have to run. Someday, we'll have rights, just like every other citizen. Every Normal."

I roll my eyes, quietly snorting. *That's right, Mom. Keep hoping.*

Mom sighs again, her sour-coffee breath filling the car. Her hair is greasy, her face lined, deep shadows beneath her eyes. She badly needs a shower; we both do. But there wasn't time. We haven't stopped driving except for gas and to pee.

Links and Info to More Bonus Material For HUNTED

I hope you've enjoyed this short story and the excerpt from HUNTED. If you'd like to check out more free goodies for HUNTED, go here:

<http://www.cherylrainfield.com/bookGoodies.php?title=HUNTED>

Among the goodies, you will find:

- a bonus HUNTED postcard (short) short bonus story
- a bonus HUNTED mini comic book—free for people who've bought HUNTED, or available for purchase (it will be released late Nov 2011)

- the HUNTED book trailer <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uEvx0jdTdOw>

- a video on my inspiration for writing HUNTED http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7s76ix_g6Xc

- an interactive and printable questionnaire on what Paranormal power you'd like

- a playlist of music that fits HUNTED

- a "Paras Survival Handbook"

- a "ParaWatch Guide"

and more.

The First 3 Pages of SCARS

SCARS

CHAPTER ONE

"Someone is following me." I gulp air, trying to breathe.

Carolyn leans forward, her face worried. "What makes you say that?" There's a hesitation in her voice that stings me.

"You don't believe me!" I spit the words out at her, then look away, twisting my hands together to keep them from trembling.

"I didn't say that. I don't know enough about this yet to know what to believe. Why don't you tell me about it?" So you can go tell my parents?

But she won't; I know she won't. Client-therapist confidentiality and all that. And I trust Carolyn; I really do. But does she trust me?

I run my tongue over my dry lips. It almost doesn't seem real, now that I'm sitting here in her air-conditioned office. But I didn't imagine it. I couldn't have.

"I hear footsteps behind me when I'm out walking alone. Heavy footsteps that stop when I stop and start when I start." Carolyn nods, her gaze never leaving mine, and I know she's taking me seriously.

My breath is so shallow I'm almost dizzy. "I keep looking back, but I never see anyone watching me. But as soon as I start walking again, the footsteps are there."

I know how that sounds. Like I'm paranoid. Crazy. I'm so afraid I'm imagining all of this, that it's just an echo from the past. But that doesn't make the watched feeling go away. It's only gotten stronger.

I look out the window, away from Carolyn's worried eyes, and stare at the buildings across from us, at the dirty red bricks, the storefront windows, the parking signs shaking in the wind. My arm throbs with pain beneath my long sleeve.

I usually feel so safe in Carolyn's office, but nothing is working today-not the soft green ferns on her bookshelves, not the smell of peppermint tea and honey, not even the soothing sound of her voice. If I could draw her office right now, I'd use the dark, heavy lines of charcoal and the foggy greyness of an ink wash, not the bright, happy colors of gouache that I usually see here.

I shiver. "I heard the footsteps again this morning-but I was too scared to turn around."

"That sounds terrifying." Carolyn crosses her legs. "But have you thought of the possibility that someone was just going the same way as you?"

"It didn't feel like that. . . ." I'm shaking now, trembles coming from deep inside me, spreading outward. "Do you believe me?" I feel like a little kid looking for reassurance, not a fifteen-year-old who's in the top ten of her class. Carolyn looks at me with so much compassion that I want to bolt from the room. I want to accept her caring, to just gather it in, but I'm afraid to. I'm afraid of how much I need it-and how much it'll hurt if she stops.

Carolyn touches my hand, her wedding ring as warm as her skin. "I believe you, Kendra."

"You do?" My shaking stops.

"I do. You've never given me any reason to doubt you."

But having no reason to doubt me is not the same as believing me. The shaking starts up again.

"Do you have any idea of who it might be?" Carolyn's voice is soft, like she knows I want to run.

A door snapping shut. His hand on my wrist.

"It's . . . him."

"The man who molested you?"

"Yes." I wince and clench my trembling hands in my lap, digging my nails into my palms. But the trifling pain isn't enough to distract me.

"It must be terrifying for you to think he's out there somewhere."

"It is," I whisper.

"But Kendra, pedophiles don't usually come after their victims, especially not years later. They like easy access and frightened, compliant children who they can manipulate-not active teen girls who might fight back."

"I know. But-" I glance at my sleeve, make sure the white bandage isn't poking through. "I just have this feeling-this gut sense-that it's him."

Carolyn looks at me steadily. "And your intuition is more finely tuned than most people's. It had to be, for you to survive."

I shrug, but I know she's right.

A door snapping shut. His hand gripping my wrist. A handkerchief falling. I squeeze my fist; the stiff skin beneath my bandage screeches, spreading pain through my whole body. I clench my jaw and breathe out slowly. Can't let the pain show.

"What're you thinking right now?" she asks.

"Nothing!" I squeeze harder, hoping the pain will clear my head.

"It looks to me like something's going on."

About the Author

I love to read. Books nurture me, helped me survive the abuse I endured as a child and teen. I also love to write. I write fantasy books and edgy, realistic fiction for teens.

My fantasy books often hold hope that I need, and feel others might need, too, while my realistic fiction is gritty, intense, and emotional. All of my books have fragments of the abuse I experienced. I write about some of the harsh things teens go through...things that I think shouldn't be hidden. But I also write about healing, hope, and love, and finding courage and strength.

In SCARS (WestSide, 2010), Kendra must face her past and stop hurting herself before it's too late. It's my arm on the cover. There's a lot of me in SCARS; like my main character, Kendra, I am an incest survivor, I used self-harm to cope, and I'm queer. In my teen paranormal fantasy, HUNTED (WestSide, Oct 2011), Caitlyn is a telepath in a world where that is illegal, and she must choose between saving herself or saving the world. Like Caitlyn, I know what it's like to have my life threatened, to have someone stalk me, and to have to decide between hiding my true self or being who I am, even if that means danger to myself. I also drew on my experience with cults and ritual abuse in creating the world that Caitlyn lives in.

Books were my survival during my childhood, and my journey into myself. Books give me hope. I hope mine will give you hope, too, or something that you need.