

GREEN EYED MONSTER

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CHAPTER ONE

She awoke...well, came around, into blackness. Confused at first, she took a few seconds to note the fabric bound tightly round her eyes and the gag across her mouth. And knots. Knots that lashed her to the chair, stretching her muscles to the screaming point. Disorientation, shock, dismay. *What the fuck?* How had she gotten here? What was happening? Bile rose in her throat as fear rattled through her, blurring all thought, slamming her in the guts. Then her reflexes kicked in. Her personal survival mechanism that she trusted like none other. Her logic, her wits, her innate wisdom. No time to panic, to wonder at circumstance, only time to be smart.

The pounding in her head was pushed aside as she sat and listened as acutely as possible for clues, anything that might help. No breathing, no movement, no anything. Not even the air stirred. No one was there with her, not even sitting quietly. She detected no other presence at all. So what else could she hear? Noise from the outside? Again, nothing. No traffic, no weather, no neighborhood, nothing. She might as well be in a coffin, buried alive.

The chilling thought threw her into irrational horror. Panic and claustrophobia rose to swamp her. She breathed in, deep and slow. One, two, three, four, and hold for five beats, then one, two, three, four, and release. *Repeat as necessary*, she told herself,

until the fear subsides, until your heart calms. Until your wits are back inside your dumb-ass head.

Several deep breaths later and she had a grip on her panic. That was stupid, she scolded herself. Stop thinking about coffins. Her life might be in danger. Certainly her safety was. She raised her head slightly, letting her nose play detective.

Mmm, oil. Motor oil. And detergent. Yes, dishwashing detergent with a lavender scent. Nothing else. That was it. She was either tied up in someone's garage or maybe a utility room. Great, just great. Now how the hell did this happen?

She'd been in the kitchen at home. Then what? Why was it so hard to recall?

Her head was banging like a drum, as if she had a hangover, but she hadn't been drinking. Had she? *Think. Water.* She remembered sipping water, then— Oh, God. The heart attack! How could she have forgotten the heart attack? But wait a minute. That couldn't have been a heart attack. She'd have woken up in a hospital, not gagged and blindfolded on a chair somewhere.

She'd been drugged and kidnapped. It was so simple, so apparent now. She remembered drinking from the glass, her last act of normality in her own home. And then the palpitations, so strong the tumbler had slipped from her grasp to the floor. She had followed soon after, onto the cool tiles with a wave of sickening dizziness. Her head spinning and heart pumping for all it was worth.

She hazily remembered the back door had opened and someone entered. As the cloying blackness engulfed her, she recalled the relief that someone had arrived who would help her, who would run for help.

The question was, what the hell was she doing here? This wasn't help, this wasn't a hospital, this was trouble. Terrifying trouble.

Time crept by. It was important to quell her fears and not let them overwhelm her. She had to keep her mind occupied, gather clues, remember details, and keep a hold on her panic. When she

felt her spirits flag, she rallied, strengthening herself mentally for whatever lay ahead. *Knowledge is power. I am not afraid. Well, not much. I don't know who's grabbed me. I don't know what they want. But the clues I have are expanding by the minute. So relax, breathe deep, use your brain, and help yourself get out of this mess.*

Another of her senses kicked in to add to her growing database of clues. The warm glow of sunshine crept across her shoulder, and with its steady movement she tried to calculate time. Now she knew she had a window somewhere to the left. That meant an outer wall. Whatever the layout of this building was, she was on an outer edge. It confirmed her initial idea of either a garage or utility room. She hoped she was at ground level with just one wall between herself and freedom. If she could free her binds she might have a chance, but struggling proved futile. She was tied too securely. Whoever bound her knew what they were doing. That did not bode well.

Footsteps! She jerked up straighter at the measured pace of footsteps. A soft foot tread came from the right, in another room. She guessed maybe two hours had passed from when she'd regained consciousness, but she had lost the sun some time ago and all sense of daylight hours with it. Even a dripping tap would have given her a unit of measurement. This continual silence distorted all concept of time. The sudden clatter of dishes in a sink confirmed this new arrival was in a kitchen. She was most definitely in a room off a kitchen, but she was still uncertain if it was a garage or the utility room.

The clattering of dishes stopped and was replaced by a low drone and then a ding. A microwave ding. Someone was making dinner. Or lunch? She guessed dinner as the sun had earlier shone with the fading heat of a fall afternoon, but it was only a guess. These little mind games were holding her together by keeping her thoughts slightly left of center and away from her increasing stress. She needed to focus on something other than pure panic.

So, it was dinnertime. Immediately, her stomach started to

rumble. *Well, what do you know?* A vital, clue-filled physical attribute overlooked—her hunger. It could have been her clock if she'd even registered it in the first place. At work, her stomach was her timepiece, pacing her day.

She focused intently on every movement from the adjoining room. Four steps from the microwave to the silverware drawer. Two more steps and a cupboard door snapped open. It sounded like a small kitchen. This felt like a large room; utility rooms were seldom larger than their kitchens, so this was more likely the garage. Another piece of the puzzle fell into place.

Five steps and a connecting door clicked open. The entire acoustics of the room changed. She had company. Ten steps for her visitor to reach her. This was definitely the larger room. Now she smelled the waft of approaching food, and her stomach growled again. Fancifully, she thought she could probably guess the cubic footage of this room from the echoes of her rumbling belly.

Her visitor's footsteps slowed beside her and hesitated. She had the immediate impression of height, but that could have been because she was seated, or because she was feeling intimidated. *It's only an impression*, she told herself. It still had to be proven. Underlying the heady aroma of food lay the warm, soapy scent of a female? Every primal and cognizant instinct in her body told her this was a woman standing beside her. So she had one female captor. How many more were there?

"I heated up some broth. It's vegetable. Wasn't sure if you were vegetarian." The voice was soft and low with a Midwest drawl that in other circumstances she'd have found attractive. "I also got you some water and some painkillers. I'm gonna undo the gag. Please don't holler. There's no one to hear you. And to be honest, if you're difficult, I'll gag you again and take the food away. Understand?"

This was followed by the scrape of a metal tray being set on the floor beside her. Then her captor easily flicked free the gag. *This has to be the person who tied it in the first place.* She

grimaced in a fierce cheek stretch, smacked her lips, and licked them with a dry tongue. What a blessed relief.

“Here. Suck this.” The plastic nipple of a sports water bottle was gently inserted into her parched mouth.

“Just a few sips at a time.” Before she had even drawn her second greedy draught, the bottle was removed.

“Not so fast. You’ll make yourself sick.” Again, the nipple was carefully introduced and she took another sip.

“Here comes the spoon. Ready?” She listened intently to the simple noises of a spoon dipping in liquid, scraping on the lip of the bowl. Her nostrils flared at the aroma of hot, herby soup. Her stomach gave another appreciative gurgle. And then, out of the blue, an unexpected sound. A long, whispered breath?

What is she doing? Blowing. She’s blowing on the spoon. Cooling the soup like you would for a child? Kidnappers didn’t do that. Kidnappers cut off your ears and sent them to your loved ones. Maybe this was the minder until the rest of the gang arrived with their knives.

The spoon was prodding her lips. She allowed the broth to trickle into her mouth. It was ambrosia. She had no idea of the last time she’d eaten, but judging by her hunger, it must have been ages ago. Over the next ten minutes the process was repeated until the bowl was emptied.

“You enjoy that?” The voice came again as the bowl was placed back onto the metal tray. A little pulse of—what? Relief?—resonated in it.

“It was good,” she said. What came next, the gag? No, no, not that. She didn’t think she could bear it. What to do to prolong the moment, to delay the panic, to glean more information?

“Thank you,” she continued. *Keep talking. Make a connection. She seems to be kind. Well, kind enough, considering she’s a kidnapper.*

“I got some aspirin here. I’m guessing you’ve got a nasty headache. Do you want some?”

“Aspirin?”

“Yup, aspirin. That’s all it is. Promise.”

So she *had* been drugged. Definitely something in the water made her pass out. Her head was killing her. Could she trust this woman? Did she want this woman to think she *would* trust her? What was she to make of these attempts at kindness and consideration? How useful were they to her beyond her immediate physical comfort?

“No, thank you. I’d rather not. But I would like some more water, please.”

There, a compromise. She wouldn’t let her captor think she could just blow away her head pain as easily as she cooled her soup. But she would let her supply the basic needs for her comfort and survival. After all, it was all about trust. The kidnapper seemed to want some; the kidnapped had none to give.

“Sure. Here you go. Ready?” The bottle was quickly reintroduced. It seemed important her modest request was answered, that she be appeased in the small matter of extra fluids. That probably meant feelings of guilt on the part of her kidnapper. Useful information, but what else could she wheedle out of this present situation?

“Are you my minder?”

“Sorry?”

“Are you going to look after me until this is all over?”

“Oh, yeah. It should be all over in a few hours, tops. Then I’ll let you go. Don’t worry. It’ll be quick.” There was a desperate cheerfulness in the voice.

Then I’ll let you go? So this woman was in charge? Was she acting alone? How had she infiltrated her home and drugged her? And why was she trying so hard to reassure her captive all would be well? God, she felt so fuzzy and slow-witted. On a good day she’d be halfway out the door by now, leaving her captor on the floor all negotiated out. A few more sips of water, and nature came to her aid.

“I really need the bathroom.” It was true and it might be useful as long as she wasn’t directed toward a bucket in the

corner. But somehow she didn't think that was the case. Someone who blew on her broth would hopefully not make her squat over a drain hole.

“Oh, right. Hmm.”

The slight hesitancy in the voice alerted her that her captor had not really thought about her sanitary needs. *What kind of half-assed, amateur kidnapper have I got here? C'mon, what did she expect? Feed me, water me, then leave me to explode?*

Or maybe the turnover should have been immediate, was expected to be immediate. So immediate there would have been no need to feed, water, or toilet her captive. *Jesus, has something gone wrong already?* What happened to “all over in a few hours, tops”? She began to feel her initial worry rise, and with it, her panic. Her breath must have caught in her throat, for at once the voice reassured her.

“I'm gonna untie your wrists and guide you. We'll go slow. Just follow my directions.”

She was now almost certain this was the only bad guy. Flexing and rotating her newly released fingers and wrists, she stood up cautiously, relieved to have no pins and needles, and no cramps. At least her captor knew how to tie a proper knot. Was she a sailor, or a trucker? Maybe a BDSMer? She mentally shook herself out of her semihysteria.

Her arms were drawn behind, and once more, her wrists bound together. She was pulled in close to her guide's side until she could feel the crush of a soft breast against her shoulder. Yup, she was right. This was a tall one. The warmth of the connection contrasted with the chill in her body, reminding her again that the sun had long disappeared.

“Stay close. I'll guide you.” The warm voice reverberated above her head. Then, a clichéd afterthought. “And no funny stuff.”

Yes, this whole affair was beginning to smack of rank amateurism, and that was very, very dangerous for her. She wasn't sure how much control her abductor had over the situation. If

the last twenty minutes were anything to go by, it seemed pretty tenuous. The sooner she gained some leverage with this person, the better. Situations like this were all about control. She had to wrest some away from this woman, and within the next twenty-four hours, for it to be effective.

She was carefully led across the floor to the connecting doorway. It took fifteen of her shorter steps, more confirmation her captor was indeed taller and with a much longer stride. When they entered what she assumed to be the kitchen, the wave of heat made her skin flush. Left turn, six of her strides to another door, moving from tiles to carpeting, five strides to the left and into a bathroom. The change in acoustics told her this. More tiles underfoot. They stood there awkwardly for several seconds. Now that they'd reached their destination, her captor seemed to have run out of steam.

Now what? Now what indeed, she could almost hear the clunking rattle of her captor's mind. God, what an idiot. This just gets worse.

"Are you going to untie me?" Even as she asked, she could feel uncertainty oozing from the other woman.

"No," came her answer. "You might tamper with the blindfold, and I don't want you to see me."

"I won't touch it. Just free my hands so I can use the toilet. Please."

"No." This time the voice was terse. She decided not to push it. They stood in silence.

"Are you going to help me, then?" Her own voice was tight, her face turned in the general direction of her companion. A touch on her shoulder gently guided her backward.

"The bowl is directly behind you." Hands quickly popped her fly buttons, easing her Levi's down to her knees. Tentative fingers fluttered on the elastic of her lace panties before lowering them, too. She felt her face burn. A hand held her shoulder and supported her as she clumsily sat down, leaning forward

to awkwardly counterbalance her arms tied behind her. Her mortification was compounded a few minutes later as she heard the toilet tissue rip before its softness brushed against her, tidying her.

“Up we come.” The voice was brusque and embarrassed.

She was pulled to her feet and her clothing rearranged. Again, she felt like a small child, first spoon-fed, now potty trained. *Why is she putting us both through this embarrassment? It’s excruciating. I hate it. It’s got to stop, somehow.*

Leaving the bathroom, she was again guided out into the corridor. This time they turned away from where they’d originally come. She was being taken farther into the building. Good, another segment of the floor map could be pasted into her head. Garage/utility, kitchen, corridor, bathroom. It was all building up nicely. If she ever got a run for it, she at least stood half a chance of finding an exit, blindfolded or not.

A door opened. She was maneuvered through and brought to a halt. Though still nervous and vulnerable on one level, on another, her intuition was feeding her courage and confidence. Already, she had the measure of her captor, and this one was no professional. Perhaps she could work that to her own advantage; a lot depended on how the rest of the abduction played out. A speedy release was imperative. She needed to get out of here as soon as possible.

“You’ll sleep here. The gar—the other room is chilly.” She was nudged to sit on the edge of a bed. Her abductor moved away and she heard a drawer open, followed by the clinking of metal. The ties were again undone, freeing her hands.

“Lie down.” She was pressed back onto the pillows. A click, and cold metal cuffed her wrists before her. Her arms were pulled over her head, and the cuffs were then looped to the railed headboard with rope, giving her some maneuverability, but not much. Next, she felt her sneakers and socks being peeled off and a blanket drawn up to her waist.

“Tell me why you’re doing this. Is it for money?”

“No.” The answer was quick and a little too sharp. Silence.
“Well, yeah. But only what’s mine.”

“What do you mean only what’s yours? Why have you brought me here? I don’t understand.”

“You don’t have to understand. All you have to do is exactly as you’re told. It’ll be over soon. I already started negotiations with your girlfriend.”

“My girlfriend? What’s she got to do with it? What’s going on here?”

“Yeah. It won’t be long till Victoria Gresham pays back what she owes me, and you’ll be free.”

She started in shock. The metal chain of the cuffs rattled. Before she could even think to speak, she heard her abductor move toward the doorway.

“I’m leaving the door open. I’ll be down the hall. Call if you need anything.” Then she was gone with a soft, “Good night, Ginette.”