

# HOSTAGE



CINDY BONDS



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“Pack?” Gruff’s voice rumbled through her mind, coaxing her back to consciousness.

“Mmmm ...” She gripped her head and rolled to her side.

“Are you alive?”

She forced open her eyes. Darkness overshadowed the room.

“Depends. Is it nighttime now?”

“Yeah.”

“Then yeah, I’m alive.” She heard a chuckle and smiled as much as she could manage from the pain that pushed through her face. “Where are you?”

“Next room. They put you in a cell by yourself.”

Moonlight filtered in through the small slits across the top of the cell. The light ebbed as shadows moved next to the wall.

“Can I see you?”

“Almost. There’s a hole in the wall between us.”

Several fingers moved through the small hole.

“Oh.” She pushed herself to a sitting position and leaned against the adjoining wall, her breathing labored as she held her left side.

“You good?”

“Sure, cracked ribs and all,” she murmured between breaths.

“Take shallow breaths. Deep breathing will just make it worse.”

She lay back down on the cold floor, curled on her side. Her back ached. “Gruff, what information do they want from you?”

“Kane.”

“What?” She closed her eyes and breathed slowly.

“My name is Kane.”

“What? You didn’t like Gruff?” She smiled when she heard another chuckle.

“You need to rest. I don’t know what they have planned for you, but I know it won’t be good.”

“I’ll be fine, one way or the other.” She held her aching side and took short breaths.

“What does that mean?”

“Well, if I die, I’ll be in a much better place. If I get out, then I’ll make it home.” Macy winced at the pain caused by speaking. Visions of her father and brother moved through her mind. She squeezed her eyes closed, refusing to wallow in memories right now.

“Oh, you’re one of *those*.”

“What’s the matter, Gruff—I mean, Kane? No hope for the believer?”

“Not a believer.” His deep voice rumbled.

“Too bad. You remind me of someone.”

“Who’s that?”

“Saul. You can ask Jon about him.” She paused and grasped her side, her breathing labored. “Is Jon awake?”

After a few moments, she heard Jon’s soft voice.

“Yes?”

“Jon, are you a believer?”

“Yes, dear, I am.”

“Then help Kane out. Tell him about Saul.”

A chuckle moved through the wall. “I’ve never thought about that. I’ll tell him all about Saul and Paul. But I don’t think he’ll be interested.”

She sighed. “Kane, you should listen to your friend.”

“Get some rest.” Kane’s deep whisper stirred through her, giving her some form of comfort.

She shifted her body, and a cold sting burned her side. Fingering the fabric of her shirt, the nail poked her finger. She smiled.

“Kane?”

It took more energy than she imagined, stretching out her arm to push the long nail through the hole.

He took it from her. “But you might need it.”

“Nah. Don’t have the energy.”

“Rest. You’ll get your energy back.”

She nodded to herself. Her voice left her, but shallow breaths eased in and out as she drifted off.

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THE CELL CREAKED OPEN. Kane jumped.

“Get her up.”

An unfamiliar voice. He frowned. A new jailer. That didn’t bode well for her situation.

“Drink. You need your energy.”

He coughed loudly and leaned against the wall. Hopefully, she heard him and would get it. When they were allowed water, it was drugged. Whatever it was made tongues go loose. There was no need for torture if you talked freely. The problem was, he and Jon had too many things they must keep quiet.

The sounds of her choking up the water made him blow out a relieved sigh. She must have understood his not so subtle signal.

“No more spitting it up. Drink it all.”

Several moments ticked by while he waited. Her cell door finally slammed shut, and he moved to the hole in the wall to look.

She lay on her side, her face buried.

“How much did you take?”

“More than I should’ve,” she whispered.

He frowned. “It might be a long shot, but this could be your chance to make a run for it. If you get out, you’ll need coordinates.”

“What?”

Her confused tone worried him, but he continued, “Just listen. 24, 14, 26.”

“24, 14, 26.” She groaned. “I’m ... I’m not so great with numbers.”

“Pack, you really need to clear your head. They drugged you. Gave you stuff to make you talk.”

“Don’t worry about me, Kane. I can talk and talk.” She chuckled.

Kane sighed. “What are the coordinates?”

“24, 14, 26. This new guy—I’m not sure I can buy time,” Macy whispered.

“Yeah, not sure the same tactic would work anyway. I don’t think you could take another beating.”

“Don’t worry about me. I can take care of myself.” She sucked in a deep breath and groaned in pain. “You just—you stay alive long enough for someone to find you.”

“You find a way out. Don’t worry about me.”

Silence gave way as he leaned down and peered into the hole. She was on her side, eyes closed, breaths heavy.

He raised back up. “It’s bad enough we’re here, but how could your God allow her to be here?”

Jon sighed and shook his head. “God granted humans free will. Men make their own choices.”

Kane leaned against the wall. He gritted his teeth and pulled his knees to his chest. The cuts across his stomach burned. She didn’t deserve this. It wasn’t just torture he worried about. For her to be here ...

Swallowing hard against a dry throat, he did his best to halt his thoughts, his fear for her weighing on him. Her bright blue

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eyes resonated in Kane's mind, and he wanted nothing more than for her to be freed from this evil place.

He had to find a way to get her out, more than just some coordinates. Jailbreak was impossible. At this point, they were all too weak, too beaten down to make a push against the guards. He needed to think of something before she ended up in even more danger.

Maybe he could use the nail she gave him to pick the lock, get her to safety before dawn. Kane blew out a big breath. Exhaustion weighed on his shoulders. His job was to protect, and he had to find a way to protect her.

"I want to protect her," he whispered as he closed his eyes and leaned his head back against the wall.