

MARGARET PETERSON
HADDIX

"[A] suspenseful page-turner."

—*Publishers Weekly*

Double Identity

—ONE—

My mother is crying.

She is trying to do it silently, but from the backseat of the car I can see her shoulders heaving up and down, her entire body racked by sobs. I look out the window at the darkness flowing past our car, and all the pinpoints of light on the horizon seem far, far away. My mother always cries, now. In the beginning, back in the summer, I used to try to comfort her, used to ask her—stupidly—“Is something wrong?” And she’d force her face into some tortured mask of fake happiness, her smile trembling, her eyes still brimming with tears: “Oh no, dear, nothing’s wrong. Would you like some milk and cookies?”

That was before today, before my father hustled the three of us into the car and we drove for hours and hours across unfamiliar states, the light fading and the roads we are on getting smaller and smaller, more and more remote.

I do not know why my mother is crying. I do not know where we are going.

I could ask about our destination, if nothing else. A thousand times today I've started to open my mouth, started to squeak out, "Can you tell me . . . ?" But then I'd look into the front seat, at my mother's silent shaking, my father's grim profile, the mournful bags beneath his eyes, and all the questions I might ask seemed abusive. Assault and battery, a question mark used like a club. My parents are old and fragile. I'd have to be heartless to want to hurt them.

A red traffic signal flashes overhead, and my father comes to a complete stop and stares at the empty crossroads for whole minutes before inching forward. He's an insanely careful driver. My mother is too—or was, before she started crying all the time and stopped doing anything else.

I turn my head, looking away from both my parents. We're on the outskirts of a small town now. I squint out the window at a dark sign half-hidden in bushes: WELCOME TO . . . It's S—something, something—field, the letters in the middle covered by branches. Springfield? Summerfield? I've lost track of what state we're in. Indiana? Illinois? Could we possibly have crossed over into Iowa? Maybe one of those I-states has a cluster of seasonal villages I've never heard of: Springfield, Summerfield, Winterfield, Autumnfield. Maybe Mom and Dad are just taking me on yet another educational field trip, like when we went to the Liberty Bell and Independence Hall.

I can't quite believe this, but the thought cheers me up a little. Even educational field trips are better than sobbing and grimness.

A row of fast-food restaurants glows on the other side of my

window, and this cheers me too, even though I'm not hungry. Wendy's, McDonald's, Burger King, Taco Bell—so well lit, so safe, so sane, so ordinary. I'm so busy wallowing in the comfort of their garish lights that I almost miss hearing the first words spoken in our car in hours.

"Those are new," my father murmurs.


I glance again at the golden arches outside my window. Nothing looks particularly new to me. But . . . has my father been in this town before?

My mother doesn't answer him. Still, I peer out the window with renewed interest. In a matter of minutes, we come to a town square, with a soaring courthouse and a quaint row of shops. The shops are closed, their signs dark. Spring/Summerfield has gone into hibernation for the night or the winter or maybe even the entire century. Our headlights throw a brief glow on a flaking-away billboard on the side of a building, and I could swear part of the sign is still advertising a circus from 2006. Years ago.

My father turns onto a residential street, turns again, then once more. He pulls up to the curb and shuts off the engine in front of a dark house surrounded by huge trees. The sudden silence is horrifying, and it seems to catch my mother off guard. A tiny whimper escapes her, the sound amplified in the stillness. Surely my father hears her now; surely he and I can't go on pretending she isn't crying.

"Wait here," my father says. He does not look at Mom or me. He gets out of the car and gently shuts the door. He stands still for a second, looking at the house. Then he opens the wrought-iron gate and walks slowly toward the front door.

The streetlights illuminate little more than a square or two of



So my only protection is a kindergarten teacher
and a ninety-eight-pound female minister. . . .
And they don't even believe I'm in danger.

As Bethany approaches her thirteenth birthday, her parents act more oddly than usual: Her mother cries constantly, and her father barely lets Bethany out of his sight. Then one morning he hustles the entire family into the car, drives across several state lines—and leaves Bethany with an aunt she never knew existed. Bethany has no idea what's going on. She's worried her mom and dad are running from some kind of trouble, but she can't find out because they won't tell her where they are going.

Bethany's only clue is a few words she overheard her father tell her aunt: "She doesn't know anything about Elizabeth." But Aunt Myrlie won't tell Bethany who Elizabeth is, and she won't explain why people in her small town react to Bethany as if they've seen a ghost. The mystery intensifies when Bethany gets a package from her father containing four different birth certificates from four different states, with four different last names—and thousands of dollars in cash. And when a strange man shows up asking questions, Bethany realizes she's not the only one who's desperate to unravel the secrets of her past.

"Compelling." —*Kirkus Reviews*

"[A] twisting plot and spine-tingling creepiness." —*VOYA*

"Gripping." —*Booklist*

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