

apocalypseya: I know they kind of got overdone a few years ago but I love those ya books with the dystopic future and dangerous killing games and their painfully obvious love triangles

mags13: agreed they're a total weakness. Pretty disappointed that you don't see as many of those kinds of books anymore

apocalypseya: maybe you should write your own!

**MAGGIE LOOKED DOWN AT** her hands, then glanced at the women on either side of her. The woman on her right was sobbing, her face pressed into her knees. On her left was another woman, staring at the opposite wall. It wasn't a stoic kind of stare, though. It was the thousand-yard stare of the exhausted and disbelieving, or maybe the woman's body hadn't yet shaken off the effects of the sedative they'd all been given. Another woman stood by the double doors, banging ceaselessly and energetically, shouting, "Let me out! Let me out! Let me out!"

*So her sedative has definitely worn off, then.*

Nobody tried to stop the screaming woman. Nobody tried to comfort the sobbing woman. Most of the women were like Maggie, their body language saying that they were resigned to their immediate future.

All the women were dressed the same way, in black leggings and gray tee shirts and white sneakers. The backs of their tee shirts had bright orange numbers on them. Maggie's was number

three—she'd pulled it away from her body and peered over her shoulder to look at it.

She had not dressed herself in this stupid outfit, and that upset her a lot. It meant that someone else—possibly more than one someone else—had pawed at her, had taken her pajamas off her, had looked at her body without her permission. Maybe they'd laughed. Maybe they'd grabbed at her breasts or her thighs and she'd been completely out cold, unable to do anything about it.

Maggie wasn't as resigned as she pretended to be. She was angry. And she knew exactly who to be angry at—Noah.

Noah, her ex-husband, was a piece of shit, and when Maggie saw him again (assuming she survived the next twelve hours), she was going to kick his ass from here to kingdom come.

She wouldn't be in this situation if it wasn't for him. She was 100 percent certain of that. Most of the bad shit in her life had come down because of Noah. It was hard to remember now why she'd ever loved him in the first place, how she ever thought she could be happy with him. She sometimes thought of when they were younger, when they laughed together instead of screaming at one another all day, and it was like remembering somebody who wasn't her, remembering a character in a TV show that she'd watched long, long ago.

Now she was in a big metal room—a shipping container, if she wasn't mistaken—with nine other women who'd been equally fucked by life.

*No, not fucked by life. Fucked by the men in our lives, and not in the fun way.*

Maggie didn't know their stories, didn't know their names, but she was sure they'd all experienced the same thing—the terror of waking up in a strange place, groggy from the sedative, followed by a bright light shone in their faces.

Maggie had tried to speak, but her tongue had felt like it was

rolling uselessly around her mouth. It didn't matter, anyway. A few moments after she had opened her eyes, a man came into the small room where she was being held. That was when she had realized she was tied to the chair, and she began to struggle to get free of the cords.

The man had laughed. "Well, he said you were a fighter. Glad you won't be a disappointment. Some of them are, you know. They just cry and cry."

Maggie couldn't see the man's face as he stayed out of the pool of light that shone directly on her. Her brain felt scrambled. "Wh-what are you—"

That was all she had managed to eke out because the man cut her off.

"You will not talk. You will listen. Your daughter, Paige, is in our custody. If you ever wish to see your daughter again, you will do exactly as we say, when we say it, and you will not ask questions."

Maggie stilled the moment the stranger had mentioned Paige. This monster had kidnapped her daughter? Was Paige hurt? Was she scared? Did they mean to hurt her?

"She is not hurt," the man had continued. "And we have no intention of hurting her, unless you become a problem. Are you going to become a problem? Shake your head yes or no."

Maggie shook her head no. She had to get out of this, whatever *this* was. She had to find Paige.

"Good. Now, listen carefully, because these instructions will only be given once. You are here to participate in a survival game. At the appointed time, you and nine other participants will be released into the Maze."

Maggie could hear the capitalization in his voice as he said this—"the Maze." *What the fuck is the Maze? Am I stuck in some kind of goddamned Dashner fan's fantasy?*

“In the Maze, there will be various obstacles to your completion of the course. You will attempt to conquer these obstacles. You will not refuse to participate at any time, no matter what the obstacles entail.”

That sounded ominous. Maggie had squinted, trying to catch a glimpse of the man’s face. She wanted to be able to describe him to the police later, when she got out of the situation.

*I’m going to get out of this. I’m going to get you, Paige.*

“You will have twelve hours to complete the Maze. Anyone who does not complete the Maze in the required time will be eliminated. Anyone who does not follow all rules and directions at all times will be eliminated.”

“Eliminated?”

The hand had appeared out of the darkness, and a second later, Maggie’s ears were ringing.

“You will not speak unless you are given permission to speak.”

Maggie’s teeth had ground together. She didn’t know who this man was, but she was going to find out and make him pay for this. After she got free. After she found Paige.

“Any player who completes the Maze in the required time and under the required circumstances will be allowed to go. We would like to make sure you understand the gravity of your situation.”

The man held up a phone with a video playing on the screen. There was no sound, but the video showed Paige in a big white room. She wasn’t restrained, but she was hunched over her knees, and tears ran down her face. She wore the pajamas that she’d picked out the night before, mint green with little ice cream cones patterned all over.

*I’m going to kill this man,* Maggie thought. She could take any amount of abuse to herself, but anyone who made her baby cry could drop dead, do not pass Go, do not collect two hundred dollars.

“We don’t wish to hurt your daughter,” the man repeated. “But we will if we have to.”

Those words had rung in Maggie’s ears as she was untied by two other men, both of whom wore full balaclavas and sunglasses that covered their eyes. The men had blindfolded her, dragged her some unknown distance, and then yanked off the blindfold just before tossing her into this metal room. There had only been four other women in there then, and none of them had spoken to her. Maggie had waited with the others as their ranks grew, one by one.

Now there were ten of them waiting, waiting for a sign or a signal that their nightmare would shift, that they would have some chance to try to regain control of their fate.

Maggie’s stomach rumbled, and her throat felt parched. She supposed it was purposeful that they—whoever *they* were—had left all the women hungry and thirsty. Suffering seemed to be the point of this exercise. And there was no person on this earth who wanted her to suffer more than Noah. He was the only one who would have arranged for her to be in this situation. The man had mentioned a “he” who had said Maggie was a “fighter.” So it had to be Noah. He was the only person who hated her that much.

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