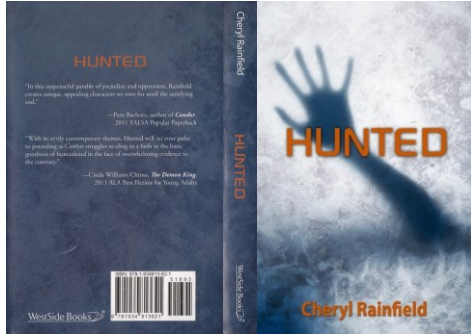


HUNTED by Cheryl Rainfield, mini book 1:6 scale.

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Print. Cut cover and paste onto thin cardstock. Cut pages in one long horizontal strip, pages still connected. Accordion fold along lines of pages. Glue white backs of pages together. Glue along spine, insert into cover. Clamp with binder clamp until dry.



<p><i>For Joss, the man I never thought I'd love, and the most loving, encouraging, wise, beautiful soul person I know. I feel so loved by you and I treasure our relationship.</i></p> <p><i>For all survivors of abuse and those who've experienced oppression, but especially for those who've overcome it. I hope you find your voice along with healing, love, and safety.</i></p> <p><i>And for all readers who like a good story. I hope you find yourselves moved.</i></p>		<p>Hunted</p> <p>Copyright ©2019 by Cheryl Rainfield. Published by Rain and Sea Press First published in 2019 in the United States by Westside Books, 60 International Road, Lark, NJ, 07041</p> <p>Kobo Edition</p> <p>All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner or form, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise whatsoever—without written permission of the publisher, except for brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews or as provided by copyright law of the United States of America.</p> <p>This is a work of fiction. All characters, places and events described are imaginary. Any</p>	<p>CHAPTER 1</p> <p>Min's gaze flicks to the nameless man for the thousandth time. Like she's afraid someone's watching her. I don't know how she thinks she can roll in the club—she walks like she's afraid of leaving her as blind and deaf as a Normal.</p> <p>"There's no one there," I say, sharp like broken glass, as if I haven't been checking every few minutes around. As if I haven't been reaching out around me for anything different. Anything odd.</p> <p>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 mind. But only another Para could do that, and I haven't noticed the aerials between the cones from the Government Paras—the Para-sives.</p> <p>Just before we go, I get the sense that I know one of the tracers—so that they know me. That's never happened before. It's too big to think about—</p>	<p>one of our own, leaning in. Burying us, without being forced to.</p> <p>I glance at Moss. She's checking the mirror wheel so tightly it looks like she might wrench it off its hinges. I wish she'd swallow her anxiety, not like the others. The way she was before...</p> <p>Moss 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, huh? We can't take any chances."</p> <p>I get my teeth, biting back words. I've never gotten used to her asking me to do what she used to do on her own. It's reversed our roles. Now I'm the parent and she's the child, needing protection.</p> <p>I knock against the car door, away from her, and open up space to the people around us. Their voices humble and roll over each other chaotically.</p> <p>Shouldn't have had that other Para down, come do this... will be setting up for me..."</p> <p>I talk through them, holding her power, for predatory instincts. For anyone focusing on us, when we should just be two anonymous blips in a car.</p> <p>"Nothing."</p>	<p>I reach out further, toward the people off the highway.</p> <p><i>...who does he think he is, cutting us down in the morning...I don't see much damned coffee...</i></p> <p>That's what's put her away tonight, the people in their cars and beds. I need for the strongest victim, the man that's chosen as a higher legitimacy than the Parawomen.</p> <p>I sense a fire burning, maybe more, in the chest of the building we've heading toward, but they're fast asleep, their energies focused on dreaming.</p> <p>I do not expect mercy, do I think deeply—and that's what I find it. The pluck of attention, where there should be none. Someone watching us intently, hiding behind layers of others' thoughts.</p> <p>I don't say words as I sharply my chest, lungs. Moss glances at me. I force a smile, try not to let the fear show.</p> <p>I've got to find out who the watcher is without them seeing me. I visualize a child of every around Moss and me. I bind it with the energy of our own bodies, building onto it.</p>
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<p>I don't reach out gently for that hidden mind. The layers open up to me slowly—excuses, a propensity for protectionism, and intense concentration.</p> <p>I laugh as I recognize the familiar mind patterns. My old Para-friend and contact, Joss. I've never met him in person, but he's helped us get to safety so many times over the years.</p> <p>"If he are you okay, watching us?" I ask, tentatively. "I told you, we'll be okay."</p> <p>I find him outside—surprised, even annoyed that I caught him keeping tabs on us. "If you then I was going to let you face the wolves alone, you're wrong," Joss says. "If always watch out for you because you've had too many near misses lately. I want to make sure you're safe this time."</p> <p>"Too many near misses" is putting it lightly. Normals used to get suspicious of us... off now... since every six months or so, but lately, their target are has increased—our watch out.</p> <p>I look at my guilty eyes. "Just someone anyone with a lock on us?" I ask Joss.</p>	<p>"No one. But something about that right. Have you sensed anyone?"</p> <p>"No." But then I didn't last time, either—until it was almost too late.</p> <p>"Keep your senses dampened down, just as usual."</p> <p>"You mean no to pass as a Normal?" I read, disregarding I don't stop my pair from talking to Moss. She's voice takes a breath. She's shocked everything inside her as nothing gets out, nothing gets in. It's like her brain is a lump of cement, unmovable—instead of energy and thought.</p> <p>"Do better to have a little discomfort and be safe," Joss says.</p> <p>"I know, I know." I look away from him temporarily, closing out memories. "Nobody's watching us, except Joss." I tell Moss. "Mind of the Paras are asleep."</p> <p>"Only to Level Wives, you know I don't like you saying 'Para' it's derogatory," Moss says, her voice as hard and brittle as an icicle.</p> <p>"No Cheryl. This is time, remember?" I say. "I remember." Her mouth tightens, then she glances at me, her face softening. "Thank you for</p>	<p>making sure we're safe. I wish I could check myself."</p> <p>I want and thank down in my seat. "You could if you wanted to, if you read."</p> <p>Moss makes a gulp of coffee. "You want to get some sleep?"</p> <p>Like I could, knowing they're after us. And the T need us. "That's all right. It's not the far now."</p> <p>God. We've always so polite to each other. Like strangers.</p> <p>I look at Joss. I can't leave what she's thinking. I stare out into the cloudy night, my tinted glasses making it as dark as ink. Even at three in the morning, there are small yellow squares of light, testament to the people still awake—feeling with crying babies, nightmares, heartache.</p> <p>People's thoughts are coming at me faster now, little blips as we pass other cars, the buildings in the distance. We drive beyond a big sign: Para sign flashing in message.</p> <p>IF A GOOD CITIZEN: REPORT PARA BEHAVIOR</p>	<p>I've seen that one so many times my eyes almost glaze over. The next sign is just as common:</p> <p>DON'T LET THE PARAS TAKE OVER: REPORT SUSPICIOUS BEHAVIOR</p> <p>Then the sign after that makes me sit up straight:</p> <p>PARAS ARE UNNATURAL!</p> <p>HEY! DO WHAT NO HUMAN SHOULD</p> <p>Since never does my spine. I've never seen that one closer together in a while. I can almost feel the heat coming in around us. Why not think we'd be safe here? But I know why—I'm easier to hide in a city.</p> <p>My eyes ache and my body's heavy with exhaustion. I try to focus on the rhythmic hum of our tires on the road, the whiplash of classical music from the speakers, the click-click of the turn signal as Moss changes lanes, her low-level hand, deep shadows beneath her eyes. She barely needs a shower; we both do. But there wasn't time. We haven't stopped driving except for gas and to pee.</p> <p>We need lights—so we can sneak away in one chisel bag and one headlamp. It makes for a fast</p>	<p>Government Para on staff, they might. Paras are forced to do the government's bidding against their will.</p> <p>To protect us, I hold the shield up around Moss and me again, getting my neck with the effort. I'm so tired that every little thing drains me.</p> <p>Moss part my knee. "We'll be okay. Can't You'll see?"</p> <p>"Sure." She says the same thing every time—but we're still making.</p> <p>Moss sighs. "It won't always be like this, honey. Sometimes, we won't have to be. Sometimes, we'll have rights, just like every other citizen. Every Normal."</p> <p>I roll my eyes, quietly cursing. That's right, Moss. Keep hoping.</p> <p>Moss sighs again, her voice coffee being filling the car. Her face is pale, her low-level hand, deep shadows beneath her eyes. She barely needs a shower; we both do. But there wasn't time. We haven't stopped driving except for gas and to pee.</p> <p>We need lights—so we can sneak away in one chisel bag and one headlamp. It makes for a fast</p>	<p>getaway, but I feel like a visitor in my own life.</p> <p>"Now it's my turn to sigh. I've lost so many people I care about—Dad, Dad's..."</p> <p>I picture my eyes close. I don't want to get pulled into the darkness.</p> <p>"Cuddle?" Joss asks.</p> <p>Her eyes, momentary thoughts wrap into the car, filling my head, making it hard to think. I stop my eyes open, please in the rearview mirror. A Para Trooper patrol car is coming up behind us. They've got a Government Para with them. I can almost taste the bitter acid of the tanker subbed in his lungs. How could I not have noticed? I ease myself. I'm too drained to deal with this. But I have to. I touch the Moss's thigh, touch it gently, and hold up the shield around us. "Para's." I say softly. "Just keep driving."</p> <p>Moss nods, gently, the back of her hand, bone-white, her eyes as wide and as scared as I feel.</p> <p>"Cuddle? Do you feel them?" Joss asks.</p> <p>"I don't see them, I see them." I nod.</p> <p>"Sure. Can you feel them?"</p>
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