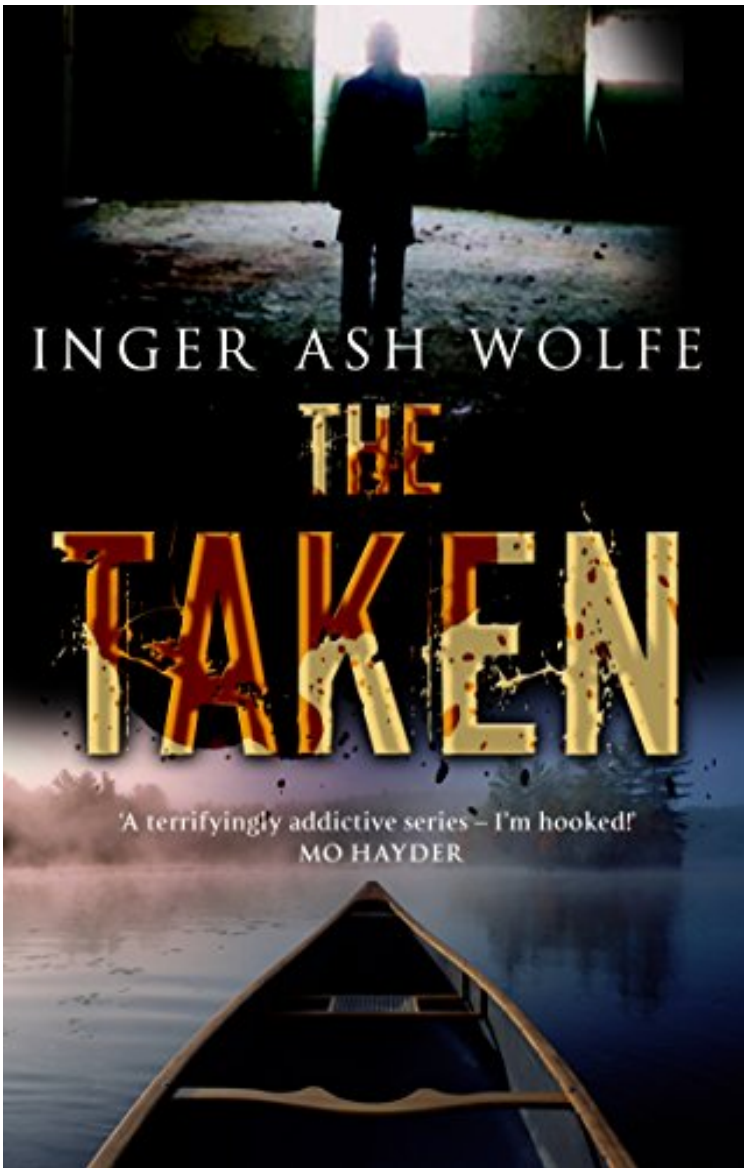


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# The Taken



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## Description :

Prsentation de l'diteur'NIGHTMARE': WHEN FACT AND FICTION COLLIDEDetective Inspector Hazel Micallef is recovering from a bad year, and a traumatic back operation that has left her in the care of her ex husband and his new wife. But Hazel is lured back to work when a body is pulled from a nearby lake: a discovery that eerily mirrors a disturbing story printed in the local newspaper.The author of the tale can't be found, and when gruesome, taunting clues begin to arrive Hazel realises she's dealing with a master manipulator, a crazed soul who knows her every move . . .ExtraitChapter 1Thursday, May 19Glynnis Pedersen's house was full of clocks. There were silver mantel clocks with lunar white faces, wall clocks made from antique car parts, clocks created from the refuse of old metal advertisements, a couple of small

digital clocks, one grandfather clock in the front hall that no longer worked, and, beside the bed in the basement apartment, an LED motion clock that displayed a message in mid-air between two prongs. This one Glynnis had programmed to read "Rise and Shine!!" which message it displayed no matter one's state of wakefulness. For Detective Inspector Hazel Micallef, once a Mrs. Pedersen herself, it only served as a reminder of whom, exactly, Glynnis Pedersen was rising and shining with. To have to take charity from a hated person was bad enough, but to do it out of necessity entailed a diminishment of one's sense of self that Hazel found hard to accept. She knew loss of pride was an occupational hazard for those who were proud, but did it have to mean being vanquished as well? Sometimes it seemed to Hazel that the situation she found herself in was one concocted for her by the Greek gods. To punish what, she couldn't be sure. But she had a feeling she was going to find out. She was now a tenant in her ex-husband's house. The roots of this strange situation were in an evening she'd spent the previous fall with him at The Laughing Crow. It was there, over drinks, that she'd hinted she might need some extra-marital nursing if her damaged back finally gave in.

She'd asked him to imagine her eighty-seven-year-old mother carrying her to the bathroom. He'd fairly blanched at what she was asking him, and Glynnis, hearing of it, laughed at it as if it were a harebrained scam cooked up by one of her drug-addled clients. But then December had happened. A serial killer had drifted through their town like a deadly gas. A murder under her own roof. And a night in the bone-chilling cold and dark that left her back shattered and her mother nearly dead. Remembering, the events lined up in her mind with a kind of dreadful inevitability, but that didn't make them any more believable. She'd had emergency surgery, but by the end of March it became clear that, in the words of her specialist, her back had "failed." Your first surgery is your best chance, your second is your last, was something Dr. Pass had been fond of saying, but he'd stopped saying it in March. By that point, last chances were all Hazel had. She and her mother had lived together not unpleasantly in the house in Pember Lake for over three years, since her divorce from Andrew. But the pain was keeping her from work, and more than once after the new year her mother had supported her on frail shoulders and taken Hazel to the bathroom: the hyperbolic scenario she'd described to Andrew boiled down to something real. Emily had finally gone to Andrew and Glynnis and laid it out. She characterized the discussion as "brief." "I used legal language so they'd understand it," she explained to Hazel. "I said the statute of limitations on marital duties was five years and that it covered all pre-existing conditions." "How did Glynnis like that?" "She was smiling so tightly I thought her lipstick would squirt off her little lips." Emily smiled herself, that wicked smile that said she'd been in charge her whole life. "That woman has a mouth like a cat's anus," she said. "Andrew understood

though." "And?" "They've given their tenants a month's notice. Family, they said." "Well that's nice," said Hazel. "At least we're still family." She lay in bed, staring at the small, high window in the wall opposite. The suggestion of late May sunlight was faint, but her mother had assured her it was there. She popped the lid of the little orange vial she was gripping in her fist and put the edge of it against her bottom lip. The thick, white pill tumbled onto her tongue. Sometimes she chewed it, this salty, bitter capsule. It worked faster this way, and the truth was, it had a little kick on it if it went down pulverized. It was now ten days after her second operation. She was taking three of them a day and there were two more refills on the label of the little orange vial. Sometimes the pain came back before it was time for the next pill and she'd take it early, send it like a fireman down a pole, the alarms shrieking everywhere. The one she'd just taken was already working: its promised six to eight hours of relief had begun with the May light outside the tiny window suddenly thickening. Glynnis might have had her clocks, but she had her pills, and they told the time with utter accuracy. In her current state, she had more in common now with her younger daughter, Martha, that beloved and feckless child who kept Hazel more or less in a state of constant worry. Jobless, loveless, dogged by depression and incapable of making a constructive choice, Hazel sometimes wondered if Martha's problems were selfmade, or if they were genetics. Looking at either side of the family (Andrew? Emily?) it was hard to credit heredity, but shipwrecked and miserable as Hazel was, she had to wonder if there wasn't some kind of tendency in the blood to fall apart. Maybe only on the Micallef side. She hadn't seen Martha in a couple of months, and she'd been careful to keep upbeat on the phone with her: no point in getting the girl more worked up than she normally was. Hazel knew that Martha teetered on a thin line when it came to her mother: on one side was resentment for everything Hazel did and had to do for her, on the other was a savage terror of loss. It meant shielding her, softening reality for her. And with her elder daughter, Emilia, living out west, it meant that Hazel felt even more alone than she needed to. But such were the facts of her motherhood. Her own mother came down the stairs bearing a tray. Andrew's beef stew, one of three things he cooked, all in the key of cow. Emily put the tray down beside the bed and arranged the pillows behind her

daughter's back so she could sit up straight enough to eat. It was this routine three times a day: the prisoner brought her meals. "Glynnis too tired to cook?" "She's got a late night," her mother said. "He should keep tabs on her." She accepted the bowl of steaming stew and the end of a crusty loaf. "She's got a wandering eye." "That's wishful thinking." Hazel tucked into the meal. Everyone had a beef-stew "secret"; Andrew's was Guinness. The only real secret was time. Given a pound of stringy, nigh-inedible beef, a few cups of water, two mealy potatoes, and maybe an onion, anyone with six hours could make a perfectly edible stew. She leaned forward to put the fork in her mouth and her scarred lower back resisted her. The pain was different than it had been before either surgery: it wasn't sharp, like there was broken glass rattling around in her; it was deep and resonant. Seated in her marrow. She had to breathe through it. "You eat?" she asked her mother. "I kept Andrew company." "Are you working both ends against the middle?" "What's the other end, Hazel?" "Glynnis." "I gather that makes you the middle." "I'm always the middle, Mother." "May 26 you get to be the middle, Hazel. Birth days and anniversaries only. All the other days you're on the outside looking in, like the rest of us." "You had to remind me, huh?" "Sixty-two," said Emily. "My little girl is finally going to be a woman." Emily continued to leaf through the growing pile of magazines beside the bed. Celebrity rags, local newspapers, travel magazines with colourful full-page pictures that teased Hazel with hints of a future out of bed. She ate in silence as her mother idly flipped the pages of one of the celebrity magazines. She held up a picture of a woman no older than twenty, one of the new crop of pop stars whose names neither of them could ever remember. She was parading down a street in Hollywood in a dress big enough to cover a volleyball, almost, with a grease-soaked paper bag in one hand and her purse slung over her shoulder. A tiny dog with a pointy face poked out of the top of the purse. "In a just society," said Emily, "almost everything this child is doing would be illegal. She should be arrested, stuck in a housecoat, and made to listen to Guy Lombardo records until she smartens up." She held the page up to her daughter. At that age, the worst either of Hazel's daughters had ever done was wear torn jeans, listen to Madonna, and occasionally puke hard lemonade all over the bathroom. How did girls like this one get so lost? Did people get lost quickly, or did it happen over time? Emily collected the tray off the bed. "You want dessert?" "No." She held up a newspaper. Thursday's Westmuir Record. "You read this yet?" "It's probably the same as last Thursday's. Not to mention Monday's. But leave it." "You're falling behind on your papers. You don't want your news getting stale, do you?" Hazel laughed at the thought of events passing so quickly in Westmuir that you'd have to make an effort to keep up. "At least it'll pass the time without your having to resort to staring at pictures of nearly naked girls eating hamburgers." Apart from the biweekly visits from Detective Constable James Wingate, the Record was her only window on the world she lived in. The paper that had been a thorn in her side for all of the previous fall was now necessary to her sanity. She held her hand out for it. "What are you going to do now?" Hazel asked. "I told Andrew I'd do the crossword with him." "I should have seen Andrew's facility with those things as a sign." "Of what?" "That he knew how to disguise himself." Emily Micallef patted her daughter's hand. "...Revue de presse" A terrifyingly addictive series I'm hooked! Detective Hazel Micallef investigates the creepiest of crimes." Mo Hayder "The work of a major talent. . . . Wolfe is a master at atmosphere and setting, capturing perfectly the glory of small-town Ontario. . . . Highly satisfying." Margaret Cannon, Globe and Mail "Just as compelling as the first . . . with an even more expertly managed plot. . . . Keeps the reader's heart pounding from first page to last in a distinctive and superior crime novel."

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