



Helpless: A Novel

Barbara Gowdy

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From the internationally acclaimed author of *The White Bone* and *The Romantic*, a haunting and suspenseful novel of abduction and obsessive love

Nine-year-old Rachel Fox has the face of an angel, a heart-stopping luminosity that strikes all who meet her. Her single mother, Celia, working at a video store by day and a piano bar by night, is not always around to shield her daughter from the attention—both benign and sinister—that her beauty draws. Attention from model agencies, for example, or from Ron, a small-appliance repairman who, having seen Rachel once, is driven to see her again and again.

When a summer blackout plunges the city into darkness and confusion, Rachel is taken from her home. A full-scale search begins, but days pass with no solid clues, only a phone call Celia receives from a woman whose voice she has heard before but cannot place. And as Celia fights her terror and Rachel starts to trust in her abductor's kindness, the only other person who knows where she is wavers between loyalty to the captor and saving the child. Will Rachel be found before her abductor's urge to protect and cherish turns to something altogether less innocent?

Tapping into the fear that lies just below the surface of contemporary city life, Barbara Gowdy draws on her trademark empathy and precision to create a portrait of love at its most consuming and ambiguous and to uncover the volatile point at which desire gives way to the unthinkable.

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