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Trafficked

Written by Sophie Hayes

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TRAFFICKED

The Terrifying True Story of a British Girl
Forced into the Sex Trade

Sophie Hayes



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This book is dedicated to Jenna,
to all the other women, men and children
who have been affected by human trafficking,
and to all the people who have supported me
– and are still supporting me – on my journey.

Acknowledgements

For the first couple of years after I came home it felt as though I were living in purgatory. One man took away years of my life when I was young and should have been happy. I know I can never reclaim the years I've lost, but I *can* make sure that they become the foundation of a new life – for me and, I hope, for other people too. Everyone deserves freedom and basic human rights, and although he stole my freedom, I am going to do everything in my power to fight back and make a difference.*

The hardest part about writing my story has been the fact that, for me, it isn't just a story. It was my life – and something reminds me of it in some way every day so that I see images in my head of what happened, like a film playing over and over again. But instead of making me weaker,

that reinforces the strength other people have helped to give me. I remember that I am strong and that I will not let him beat me, and this gives me the inspiration and motivation I need to be able to do what I can to try to help prevent similar crimes being perpetrated against others.

The amazing people who have protected and guided me since I returned to the UK have saved my life. They are the ones who have made it possible for my book to be written, and I want to thank them with all my heart.

It devastates me knowing what my mum had to endure. I lived through what happened, but she can only imagine it, and I'm not sure which is worse. My family have been my world; they have supported me and have never treated me any differently as a result of what happened. My mum and my stepdad are my guardian angels, not least because they rescued me from a fate that I don't even want to think about.

I was very fortunate to make contact with STOP THE TRAFFIK. Bex, particularly, became my lifeline when I thought I was going to drown; she has become my friend and my inspiration, and I will never be able to thank her properly for what she's done for me. I am also indebted to Ruth, Simon and the rest of the team at STOP THE TRAFFIK, who have become my extended family, and to the friends who have helped me to see things differently by showing me that there are amazing people in the world and by giving me hope that one day I might find someone who loves me for who I am. My friends have helped me to

open my eyes, and for that – and many other things – I thank them.

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And I want to thank all the people involved in making my book a reality – my publisher, HarperCollins, Jane, my wonderful writer, and my agent.

Thank you to all the people who have helped and supported me, and thank *you* for reading my story.

*I have recently set up the Sophie Hayes Foundation (www.sophiehayesfoundation.org) in the hope of being able to help increase awareness and raise funds to assist the NGOs that work so hard to combat human trafficking and to support survivors of this terrible crime.

If you've got a story to tell, or just want to make contact with someone who might be able to understand how you feel, then please do write to me via the website. I would love to be able to include some 'survivors' stories' on it, so that other people can see that, however long and dark the tunnel may be, there can be light at the end of it.

Chapter 1

My brother's 18th birthday party was an elaborate event – a glamorous celebration that had been carefully planned by my mother down to the very last detail so that nothing could go wrong. We had a beautiful meal at a hotel with all our family and friends and when everyone had finished eating, my father took the microphone and announced that he'd been asked by my mother to give a speech about his eldest son. There were many good things that could be said about my brother, and a whole host of funny and touching anecdotes that could be told about him. So as the room fell quiet and everyone turned to look at my father, they were all smiling with a benign expectancy that quickly turned to horror when he announced that he could think of nothing to say other than that he was disappointed to have fathered such a 'useless piece of shit'.

For a moment, there was a stunned silence and then, as a low murmur of disapproval spread around the room, my grandfather leapt to his feet, snatched the microphone from my father's hand and, with tears in his eyes, began to talk about all the good things his grandson, Jason, had done and how much everyone in the family loved him.

When I eventually dared to look at my brother, he was sitting completely still, staring into the distance above everyone's heads with an expression of almost physical pain on his face. I looked away quickly, feeling sick, and wondered how any man could do such a terrible thing to *anyone*, let alone his own child, who was guilty of nothing other than trying for 18 years to gain his father's love and approval.

I think I knew in that moment that my parents' marriage was over, although it had a few more death throes to go through before they divorced.

Another event that finally tipped the balance for my mother occurred one night not long after Jason's birthday. I had come home from an evening out and, not realising that Jason and his girlfriend, Harriet, were babysitting for a neighbour, had locked the front door and gone to bed. Half an hour later, I was woken up by the sound of the doorbell. It rang just once, but almost immediately I heard footsteps thundering down the stairs and then Harriet's voice calling my mum's name and screaming, 'He's going to kill him. Help! Please! Someone *help!*'

My mother had already reached the top of the stairs by the time I'd jumped out of bed and rushed on to the land-

ing. As I ran after her into the hallway, I could see Jason standing on the doorstep with blood pouring from his nose.

Harriet was sobbing and my father was waving his arms in the air and shouting, when suddenly Jason stepped forward, pushed Dad out of the way and yelled, 'You're a fucking wanker. I *hate* you. Why don't you go away and leave us all alone?' Then Jason rushed up the stairs and locked himself in his bedroom. My father smirked, shrugged his shoulders and went to bed.

Luckily, the commotion hadn't woken my younger sister and brothers, so Harriet, my mum and I went into the kitchen. For a few moments, we sat together around the table in a state of shocked disbelief, until Mum eventually broke the silence by asking the question that was in all of our minds when she said, 'What the hell just happened?'

It turned out that my father had been so annoyed at having been woken up by Jason's tentative ring on the doorbell that he'd flung open the front door and, without saying a word, head-butted his own son.

My mother sighed and lifted her hands off the table in a gesture of weary defeat as she said, 'Well, that's it then. I can't stand by and allow him to hit my children. That's one thing I'm *not* prepared to put up with.'

I felt terrible about what had happened – not just because I felt so sorry for Jason, but also because I knew it was my fault. Jason didn't have a key to the front door and

I hadn't made sure he was home before I locked it that night. Even now, I can't bear to think of the distress my thoughtlessness caused him.

So that was the second of the three 'final straws' for my mother. The last one came as a result of someone telling her that my father was seeing other women. When she confronted him, they'd been shouting and arguing for ages by the time I walked into the living room and heard Dad shout at Mum, 'She was a dead ringer for you, only *much* younger.' Then he stormed out of the room and Mum burst into tears.

It turned out that Mum's 'dead ringer' hadn't been the only woman Dad had been sleeping with. There were dozens of them. Apparently, he'd joined a group of swingers – not the sort who swap partners, but the ones who go to parties that have been organised for the specific purpose of having sex with total strangers, who are paid to do whatever weird and kinky things men like my dad want them to do.

When Mum left him, she discovered he'd remortgaged the house, not for financial reasons – he earned a considerable income and didn't have any money worries – but because he'd been siphoning money into foreign bank accounts. So Mum got very little money from the divorce, but she didn't really care, because all she wanted by then was to get away from my father and make a new home for herself and her children, where no one shouted at her and told her constantly that she was useless and stupid.

I was 17 when my parents separated, and I've rarely spoken to my father since then.

I was just a few hours old when I was placed in my father's arms for the first time. Apparently, I started to scream and he glanced down at me, handed me back to my mother and promptly lost all interest in me. It was an indifference that soon became mutual, and by the time I was in my early teens, I'd learned to accept the fact that I didn't like my own father. Fortunately, though, I've always loved my mum – as well as being a really good mother, she's my best friend and I can talk to her about almost anything.

I don't remember *ever* feeling any real affection for my father. He wasn't physically abusive when I was a child, but he *was* a bully, who only really communicated with his wife and children by shouting and swearing and telling us how useless we were. Gradually, over the years as I grew up, I almost got used to the way my heart started to thump whenever he was angry – which seemed to be most of the time. But I never got used to the things he'd do quite deliberately to frighten us, or to his sick jokes, which often reduced me to tears of shock.

I was one of five children, all of us unplanned, unwanted by Dad and loved completely by Mum. My childhood was lived under the shadow cast by my father's verbal and emotional abuse, but it was Jason who suffered most as a result of his bullying.

Jason was a shy, cheerfully energetic child who hated the thought of doing anything wrong or of drawing people's attention to himself for any reason. Just imagining being late for school could reduce him to a state of hand-wringing anxiety, which our father always referred to as 'girly fussing' and which never failed to make him scornfully angry. In fact, Jason was about as far removed as it was possible for him to be from the kind of son our loud-mouthed, brashly over-confident father might have wanted – had he wanted a son at all.

It was heartbreaking to watch Jason trying so hard to please Dad, and although *I* learned from quite an early age to accept that none of us would ever be able to do anything right in his eyes, my poor brother never gave up hope of one day winning his affection. It was what Jason wanted more than anything else in the world, but it seemed that the more he tried, the more Dad intimidated and belittled him and the more nervous and, eventually, emotionally unstable Jason became.

Jason was the sort of child who always had everything organised for school the night before – his books in neat piles and his clean clothes laid out on a chair in his bedroom, so that all he had to do in the morning was get washed and dressed and he was ready to go. For me, however, the most important rituals of every morning revolved around making sure my uniform looked perfect and my hair was immaculate – which meant that I took rather longer to get ready than he did. And while

I was rushing around the house searching for my school bag or my books, Jason would stand by the front door, white with distress as he watched the minutes tick away on the grandfather clock in the hallway. Eventually, my father – who drove us to school most days on his way to work – would shout at him for looking so ‘fucking pathetic’ and then at me for being so disorganised and stupid.

I still feel sad and guilty whenever I think about all the times I made us late for school, although I didn’t do it deliberately. We went to a good school and I think that, because I’d already accepted my father’s opinion that I was ‘inadequate’, I was afraid of failing to meet the standard expected of us, to the point that making sure I was well turned out became almost an obsession. But I knew how much Jason dreaded the thought of having to walk into assembly on his own when everyone else was already sitting down, and I know it was my fault when, breathless with humiliation, that’s exactly what he had to do on many occasions.

One morning, when Jason was 10 and I was nine, we were running late as usual and when I finally found my school bag, ran out of the house and jumped on to the back seat of the car beside my brother, Dad gave a self-satisfied smirk and said, in mock dismay, ‘Oh dear, Jason, you’re going to be late. Assembly will definitely have started by the time you get to school. You’re going to have to walk in all on your own. Perhaps if you crawl

on your stomach like a snake they won't notice you.' Then he threw back his head and laughed, amused by the image he'd conjured up and by Jason's clearly apparent anguish.

Jason began to cry and to plead, 'Please, *please*, Dad, try to get us there on time.'

But instead of making my father sympathetic – as you'd expect any man would be when his son was so blatantly upset – the sound of Jason crying seemed to act like a trigger that flipped a switch in his brain. He stopped laughing abruptly and as I glanced up nervously into the rear-view mirror, I saw his mouth twist into an expression of contempt and he suddenly shouted, 'You want to be early, do you? Is that why you're snivelling like a girl? Okay, Jason, we can be early.' Then he pressed his foot down hard on the accelerator, throwing us back into our seats as the car surged forward.

Sick with fear, I clutched so tightly at the seatbelt where it lay across my chest that my knuckles turned white and I could feel my fingernails digging painfully into the palms of my hands. For the next few minutes, we sped down one blurred street after another, while Jason hugged himself, rocked backwards and forwards, and whimpered.

I remember seeing a flash of colour ahead and catching a brief glimpse of the expressions on the faces of two men who were standing talking together at the side of the road. Beside each of the men was a bicycle, on which they were resting their hands casually and which toppled and fell to

the ground as our car spun out of control and veered across the road towards them.

It was obvious that the men weren't going to have time to get out of the way. My father cursed and Jason and I screamed. By some miracle, we missed them by inches, my father managed to regain control of the car and we continued along the road at a slower speed while he shouted at us over his shoulder, '*See! See what you've done, you little fuckers. You nearly made me kill those men.*'

Jason was hysterical and I was sobbing, both because I was frightened and because I had a terrible sense of guilt. If we *had* killed the men – as it had seemed certain we were going to do – it would have been *my* fault because *I* had made us late. My father was right: I was 'fucking useless'.

When we arrived at school, Jason almost fell out of the car and then ran through the open wrought-iron gates, his shoulders hunched and his school bag clutched tightly to his chest as if he was trying to protect himself from physical attack. But I refused to follow him. Still shocked and shaking, I needed the comfort and reassurance that only my mother could give me. So I cried and screamed until my father took me home and then I sat in my bedroom, trying to block out the harsh, angry sound of my parents' voices as they shouted and argued with each other – because although my mother seemed to do little to deflect my father's nastiness when it was directed towards her, she somehow always found the strength to speak up in defence of her children.

The car incident was just one of the many, almost daily, occurrences during my childhood that made me realise my father didn't really like us. Someone once said that he simply didn't have the capacity to love anyone, and I think they were right. According to my grandmother, he used to delight in disappointing and upsetting my mother, even when they were first going out together. Apparently, no one had been able to understand why such a pretty, popular and cheerful girl agreed to marry such a sour, ill-mannered man. She did marry him, though, despite the fact that as the wedding car drove slowly along the streets towards the church, she knew she was making a terrible mistake. She once told me that although she'd loved my father, she would gladly have turned around at that moment and gone home again, still single, had it not been for the guilt she'd have felt about all the money her parents had spent and all their efforts to make it a wedding day to remember.

One morning a few months after they were married, when my mother was pregnant with Jason, my father rapped loudly on my grandparents' front door and announced to my bemused grandmother that her daughter was a 'soft piece of shit', of no use to man nor beast, and that he was returning her to her parents' tender care because he wanted nothing more to do with her. He took her back again, though – probably when he realised how inconvenient it was going to be for him to have to look after himself and the house. But this was a pattern he was

to repeat many times over the next few years, and it wasn't long before my mother began to believe that she really was 'pointless', 'bloody irritating' and 'fucking stupid'.

Although my father often shouted and swore and constantly disparaged us all, he was rarely physically violent, and by the time I was in my teens I'd begun to answer him back. I think the fact that I was willing to stand up to him – verbally at least – made him back off a bit. But Jason – who, despite his almost permanent state of nervous apprehension, had a surprising amount of (groundless) optimism – kept trying to form a relationship with Dad and to win his approval. It was a hopeless task, however, and one that was to cause him nothing but heartache.

When I was seven, my mum gave birth to Emily and two years later to twin boys – the babies of the family, Mark and Jamie – all three of whom were 'accidents', just like Jason and I had been.

Although he hadn't had a stable or happy childhood or a good education, Dad was clever when it came to business and making money, so we lived in a very nice, big house in an affluent part of town. But I don't really remember him doing anything else specifically for any of us, and I often wondered why my mother stayed with him.

When she finally filed for divorce, protecting her children and escaping from my father's relentless denigration were Mum's main concerns. However, because money mattered so much to Dad, he couldn't believe she wanted

nothing from him and he used to send her vicious text messages telling her he'd break her legs if she came after him for maintenance. He was angry with me as well – he always had been, for reasons I didn't understand – and one of the last things he said to me, with his characteristic turn of phrase, was, 'You're dead to me. You can rot in hell for all I care. I wouldn't piss on you if you were on fire.'

When our parents divorced, Jason continued to try to win Dad's approval and was so full of hurt and anger that he was spinning dangerously out of control. Until quite recently, I'd have said that my father didn't have any significant effect on my life – I told myself that as I didn't really like him, I could live with the fact that he didn't seem to love or care about me. I realise now, though, that being unloved by my own father not only made me feel unlovable, but also made me unsure about what loving someone really means, anxious about trusting anyone, particularly men, and afraid in case, like my father, I wasn't able to form loving, stable relationships. I had an image in my mind of living in *The Little House on the Prairie*, where everything was perfect and people were always kind to each other, and I decided that if I couldn't have *that*, I didn't want anything at all.

So perhaps it was surprising that I had *any* long-term relationships over the next few years. But I did – one with a man I loved and one with someone I thought I loved but who was really just a good friend. And then there was Kas, who, in time, became my *best* friend – not least, perhaps,

because he was the opposite of my father in every way. Whereas Dad was loud, vulgar, self-engrossed and aggressively cruel, Kas was caring, charismatic and effortlessly polite. But even with Kas, who I first met when I was 18, it was a long time before I allowed myself to trust him. Once he did become my friend, however, he became quite an important part of my life and it felt as though he was the one person on whom I would always be able to depend.