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Mystery

Stolen Lives
Jassy Mackenzie
Soho Crime
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"She'd said the wrong thing. She knew that immediately. Salimovic's thin lips twisted into a smile and Jade realized with a sinking heart that the trafficker had realized she was bluffing," writes Jassy Mackenzie in her gripping novel about the horrors of sex trafficking. Stolen Lives is as thought-provoking and socially conscious as it is suspenseful.

In Mackenzie's tale, set mainly in Johannesburg, South Africa, a mysterious woman hires private investigator Jade de Jong as a bodyguard. Upon accepting the job, Jade quickly realizes the situation is far more complex than it first appeared. As she seeks to protect her client, and find out what happened to her missing husband and daughter, Jade realizes several elements of the woman's story don't quite add up.

Meanwhile, in London, Scotland Yard barely misses breaking up a ring of sex slaves and discovers that several key members have fled to South Africa. The cases begin to intertwine as Jade and her former lover, David, a police detective, search for truth only to find themselves digging deeper into a dangerous sex trafficking syndicate. And when the syndicate, which has shown itself unafraid to torture and kill, kidnaps David's young son, time quickly begins to run out. Jade and David, with some help from Scotland Yard, must rescue David's son and the enslaved women and children and stop the syndicate's ringleaders before they flee the country.

Mackenzie, a resident of South Africa, edits and writes for the annual publication Best of South Africa. Her skill as a storyteller shines. She artfully acknowledges the imperfections in South Africa's law enforcement, government, and society while showing how good people strive hard to improve things. And, along the way, she demonstrates her deep love and respect for her home country.

South Africa provides a rich setting for a mystery and allows for a captivating plot. Mackenzie has created rich, well-rounded characters and successfully keeps the suspense high throughout. The mystery stands confidently on its own, yet the book goes beyond a simple story.

Sex slavery and trafficking are becoming more widely discussed worldwide. Mackenzie tackles this horrible industry head-on, revealing how it works, how workers are treated, and why breaking up the trafficking organizations proves so difficult. Without preaching, this book should cause readers to care about, and perhaps even get involved in fighting, the sex trafficking industry. A fascinating read with a strong heart.

Diane Gardner