

Marvin Gray



Maggie
May

MAGGIE MAY

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CHAPTER ONE

Tuesday

The story started with a kid, a fat Hispanic kid who changed my life forever. When he walked into my office, I was sitting behind my secondhand desk, in my second rate office in the second worst section of the city. I was wondering who I might sucker into loaning me a few bucks to make the overdue office rent, and how to get my rustbucket of a car moved before it got towed.

I had just lit a smoke and exhaled and was trying to make smoke angels, when in walked the fat Hispanic kid, maybe seventeen or eighteen years old. Acne spilled over his cheeks and nose. His vintage Lakers purple and gold NBA Sharktooth cap was twisted around backwards. White iPod earphones dangled through the shoulder of his Kobe Bryant Lakers jersey. And his khaki shorts nearly touched his deep blue Nike Trainers.

“You Gray?” he asked.

“Depends on who’s asking.” You gotta get smart with youngsters. How else they gonna respect you?

“You Gray or not?”

“Yeah, I’m Gray, are you with a collection agency? Toys for Tots? Sertoma Society? I already gave at the office? Beat it!”

He looked at the sign and said, “This is your office.”

When the kid’s lips moved and words came out his pudgy cheeks, it was as if I were watching a movie from the safety of the cinema. I wasn’t part of it. Something psychiatrists call dissociation. Like when you’re an infant and witness a gory murder or something. Scars you for life. That’s what happened when this kid walked into my life.

“My mom says you’re my old man. Lucky me.”

I didn’t know how to react. They didn’t teach you that online. So, I reached in my back pocket and pulled out a pint of gin. I took a couple shots, offered it to my son, and when he reached for it, I snatched it back.

“Click it or ticket it, kid!”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“It means obey the law. You’re way too young to be drinking. How else do you think an old cow like your ma could lure a young hunk like me into the sack? She drugged me with alcohol when I was a mere lad.”

The kid looked at me closer. He stood on his tippy-toes to see as much of my physique as possible, rubbed his eyelids as if he didn’t believe his own eyes, and then slid into the red velvet chair that I had snagged from the dumpster behind the Pole Lock, a strip club on Sunset Strip.

“She said you were a loser,” my kid told me, looking around the room. “She has a proclivity to understatement.”

“Well, she never told me about you, so imagine how depressing it is for me,” I told him, getting even. You can’t let these little turds get the edge on you. I didn’t know much about rearing kids, but I knew a lot about the school of hard knocks. That’s where I graduated.

I fished the keys to my rust bucket out of my pocket and tossed them to him. “There’s a white 1986 Hugo in a private parking spot. Let’s see if you got the brains to find it, figure out how to start it, and move it to a space where I ain’t gotta pay for the next couple hours.” I nodded and snubbed out my smoke. “Go on, now. Snap to it. If you can do that, your old man will take you over to the drugstore to get a Vanilla Coke.”

He looked unimpressed and shrugged.

“Hey, kid, you got a name?”

“Yeah, I got one. And a birth certificate to prove it.”

Where did he get this stuff? Had to be his mother’s side of the family.

“Care to share it? The name, not the birth certificate.”

“Josh.”

“Pansy name.”

“Lousy gene pool.” The kid was growing on me.

“What’s your ma’s name?”

“It’ll cost you \$20.”

He was my kid. If there had ever been any doubt, this eliminated it. I pulled a five spot out and tossed it on the desk.

“That’ll work,” he cracked wise. “Demi Moore.”

When he made for the dough, I snatched his wrist. The lightning speed from his old man must have surprised him.

“Her real name, you little simian.”

He jerked his wrist free and rubbed it. “Maggie May,” he answered, rubbing his wrist. “That hurt, jerk wad.”

I tossed him the \$5 bill. It floated in the air like a sad torn leaf for a second and then sunk back to the desk. Hesitantly, he took it.

“Said you met her at Hefner’s Playboy Mansion. Ring any bells?”

Did it ever?

He was saying something, but I couldn’t quite make it out. I was fumbling through my drawer for the only *Playboy* issue I had ever purchased, nearly a decade and a half ago. I did the math. My boy couldn’t have been more than 14. Not old enough to shave. Nor to drive. Nor to park my Hugo. Better get my keys back.

There she was: Miss May. Margarita Esquivel. A.K.A., Maggie May. Glamorous and enticing. Sexy. Every man’s dream. And I let her get away. The memories started pouring over me like thick maple syrup. Sweet and gooey. Smothering me.

I needed a drink. And gin wasn’t gonna do the trick.

The kid was saying something.

“She’s in trouble, Gray. She’s like, tell your dad I need his help. I got tangled up with the wrong people, and I’m in danger. She’s like, I can’t go to the police. I got nowhere else to turn. I need your dad’s help. He’s the only one I trust.”

CHAPTER TWO

This was too much to comprehend. Within a period of five minutes, I had learned that I had a teenage son—a bit wimpy and dull-witted, I admit, but still flesh and blood—and that I had sired him with the sexy Maggie May, a certain Miss May *Playboy* centerfold. Her birth name was Margarita Esquivel, the only woman I had ever loved. After nearly a decade and a half, she had sought me out as a private investigator because she was in trouble and needed my help. And if that weren't enough, my 1986 Hugo was in danger of being towed. I didn't know where to begin.

"I don't know where to begin," I told Josh.

He shook his pudgy head. "What a douche. Like, what did Mom ever see in a loser like you?"

I hustled my son out of the office and into the street. I spun his Lakers cap around forward and hitched up his shorts. There was a smudge on his chin, so I licked my thumb and tried to wipe it off.

"Stop it, you freak," Josh shouted and slapped my hands away. "You ain't my dad." He pulled his shorts back down below his buns and rotated his cap around backwards. "Well, you are, I guess, but you ain't." The kid seemed flustered. "Just leave me alone. Mom's the one that needs your help, not me."

"Give me a push," I ordered my kid. God, it was great to have offspring who could perform manual labor, like shove off your stalled Hugo. I popped the clutch, and it started. We breezed through a stop sign barely missing Murph's tow truck, which was on his way to hitch my car.

"Tow this!" I yelled at the driver with glee. We hung a left and entered Ventura Boulevard.

"Like, dude, ain't you got air conditioning in this heap? It's hot. Who drives in southern California with no AC? And in a freakin' Hugo? Do Lexus or BMW ring any bells?"

"I just moved here from the Midwest where nobody uses

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Marvin Gray is an American humor columnist for the Observer magazine in Hua Hin, Thailand, having published over 25 articles since 2010. *Maggie May* is his first novel. Currently he is writing his second novel *They Only Come Out at Night*.

He graduated with a General Education Development Certificate from Hoboken Adult Education Institute with honors. He has lived and worked in Afghanistan, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Iraq, Pakistan, and Thailand. He speaks Arabic, Spanish, and Urdu-Hindi. Marvin plays the harpsichord, enjoys jousting and extreme winter sports, and volunteers for numerous charitable events.

He lives with his two soul mates, Pet and Rave—twin sisters and former professional dancers—along with their kitten Sebastian Cabot in a loft above a gentleman's club in Los Angeles.

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I look forward to hearing from you.

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