



Deborah Noyes's CAPTiViTY

CAPTiViTY (US \$25.95 / CAN \$29.95)

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By Deborah Noyes

Reviewed by Pam Rosenblatt

Fiction writer Deborah Noyes has written a most intriguing, suspenseful, and captivating story that begins with Captivity's eerie green, black, and white book cover with a double image of a young girl in a sheer white dress.

Immediately the reader's imagination is captured.

Then, through detailed imagery and articulate, often lively and clever language, she draws the reader into Captivity, a three hundred and forty page read based on a real life paranormal drama surrounding the Fox sisters, mainly Maggie and Kate, who lived between 1833 and 1893. They lived in upstate New York. Noyes's Captivity was recently published through Unbridled Books.

Maggie and Kate Fox became famous for practicing spiritualism and being very good at it, so good that many people around them considered them legitimate Mediums.

In Microsoft Word's Encarta Dictionary English (North America), there are actually fourteen different definitions of the word "Medium". But only one, number 5, discusses the word "Medium" spiritually, as "somebody supposedly communicating with dead", or more explicitly, as "somebody believed to transmit messages between living people and the spirits of the dead".

Captivity lifts more than the spirits. Questions raised include: Are the young Fox sisters legitimate mediums? What is imagination? What is reality? What is life? What is death? What is "madness" -- is it simply a state of mind or is it simply a way that one perceives life?

And, of course, is there a spiritual world? And if there is a spiritual world, what does this mean to the Fox family, to the Gill family – mainly to Clara Gill, another main character, who is a woman in her forties, a recluse, and befriended by Maggie as soon as they become acquainted; to the neighbors; and, finally, to the reader? And, as the reader reads on, even more questions abound. Noyes has written Captivity to be a thinking person's novel.

The book begins with "Chapter 1 ** Machinations" with Clara Gill thinking, "A bell is tolling for me,....Or in spite of me." She isn't in a happy state. She thinks that her father is about to announce his engagement to

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Widow Bray and Clara feels that she has lost her status as matron of the house. Besides this inner conflict, Clara doesn't like to leave the house, and doesn't take kindly to seeing visitors, especially those people currently entering the house for a party:

If she could she would stop the voices, the laughter, rising around her like bars. Her breath is feathery, her life a crushed bird. Who are these people? Who's playing the square piano—unplayed all these years? Who thought to tune it and unseat the dust? Not Father.

Why has he exposed her this way? He owes Clara her privacy, and more. What else does she have? What more could she want? To die, maybe, or live. To leave the place between.

Clara seems to be in limbo, uncertain whether she wants to live or not, uncertain that life is worth living.

The characters of Maggie and Kate Fox are first introduced in "Chapter 2 ** Mr. Splitfoot, Do As I Do" when:

[they] are giddy with fear and on the mattress when Ma comes running with the candle. 'We've found it out,' they cry, and Ma's monstrous, flickering shadow rounds the bedroom wall. She nods hard, poor soul, hefting the candle higher, and her hand shakes.

"It" is the rapping that's robbed them of sleep and peace for so long, a hellish business, and who can hear it? Not Ma, surely.

In this second chapter, Maggie and Kate appear to have contacted the spirit of a deceased man, Mr. Charles B. Rosna. His spirit has reached the two young girls through a "Rap. Rap. Rap." series. Her mother was witness to this paranormal occurrence where the two younger sisters, Maggie and Kate, were "believed to transmit messages between living people and the spirits of the dead".

But Maggie and Kate's mother understands that her two children may have a gift of communicating with the beyond. At the end of "Chapter 6 ** The Invisibles", the suspense has built up. Noyes writes, "Can it be possible?" pleads Ma, in the dark. "How will we live and endure it?"

While the mother is uncertain and afraid, the two Fox girls are not. In "Chapter 2 ** Mr. Splitfoot, Do As I Do", they even accept their neighbors into the séance room, upon the request of their mother:

"Will you continue to rap if I call my neighbors in?" Ma trembles. It's a terror to see her this way. And a thrill beyond reckoning. Pity and fear catch like a bone in Maggie's throat, but she has no shame, evidently. It's too late for that.

"That they might hear it also?" Ma pleads.

Maggie imagines the men and boys out night fishing by Mud Creek. They'll mill and murmur with eyes full of moonshine. They'll listen intently, blow into strong hands with icy breath. She will have them in thrill.

Rap rap rap.

Ma stamps out into the darkness of the hall, clutching her shift close round a spacious bosom, Pa stumbling at her heels.

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Kate leads their visitor up and back in a hypnotic square, the walls resounding. Doesn't she see there's no one left to impress now? Where has she going to in mind? Her eyes shine like ice.

Rap. Rap. Rap.

Had the river burst its banks and come swirling in under their roof this night, Maggie understands, the Fox sisters could not have seen their way clear.

We were born for this, she thinks.

Neighbors and people from afar have quickly heard of Maggie and Kate's supernatural talents and begin flocking to the house. At this early point in the book, Leah, their older sister soon arrives and wants to split the two young girls up. (Leah eventually quickly takes Kate to the Rochester, New York, and Maggie ends up meeting and befriending the distraught Clara Gill.)

Obviously, the two main characters Maggie and Kate are enjoying themselves. But not everyone is convinced that these two young girls are actually contacting the dead. Some of the local neighbors, men, wonder about the feasibility of such psychic connections while shoveling out the Fox basement in search for the skeleton of Mr. Charles B. Rosna:

"There's that cobbler fellow down the way. Might be an insomniac hammering his leather all night."

"He's outside now, taking his nips on Obadiah's wagon whole we dig."

"Waste of a night's rest."

"Why does the spirit rap only with those girls present? It's fine sport for them."

"These children were the first to befriend it. Maybe it trusts them."

The feasibility of the Fox sisters reaching the beyond is questioned by a lot of folks. But more people want to believe that these two young girls are that spiritually gifted. Leah worries about what her two siblings have done. She seems to recognize the responsibility that the three of them have:

"You've unearthed something here in Hydesville," Leah says, "Besides your Mr. Charles B. Rosna, I mean.... You'll open up a passageway between the mortal and spirit worlds," Leah adds, nodding as if to reassure her, "This is true. Know what you've been given. You and Kate and me. The Fox sisters," she adds slyly. "We'll outwit death. We have that duty."

People like Amy and Isaac Post, friends of the Fox family, and Mrs. Lyman Grainer, whose husband is a "skeptic" want to believe in Maggie and Kate's spiritual abilities. They hold séances where:

"Only then can they enjoy the spectacle of Maggie and Kate being magnetized and slipping, with closed eyes, into a half-conscious trance state. Soon faint, eerie raps resound. The guests shift soundly in their chairs, anticipating 'manifestations.' The raps grow louder, questions are called out, and Leah painstakingly translates the raps of reply."

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Eventually, people in western New York want realistic answers from the Fox sisters. Can the said psychic occurrences really be true? Are the Fox sisters legitimate? And even Lizzie, Leah young daughter, reveals to Clara, the recluse, that even she doesn't believe her aunts are legitimate Mediums:

"It's plenty of humbug." Lizzie savors the word clearly, which has no doubt served her well of late.

"I take it you don't believe in the spirits?"

The girl bristles, stands taller. "I don't suppose you do, so why should I? Am I any less wise?"

"Am I so transparent?"

"I wager someone like you doesn't believe in much anything." Lizzie waves at the scientific drawings everywhere. "Except what you see."

Noyes's *Captivity* is a suspenseful novel filled with mystery; drama; the supernatural; and, though not addressed in this review, love affairs and murder.

Noyes has written an imaginative, stimulating book based on factual events. Everything flows along nicely; even the chapters are integrated and connect together well. It's almost as if Noyes is taking her reader on the same amazing psychic journey that the Fox sisters may have experienced. Who knows? Maybe the Fox sisters' mind-boggling trip has been replicated!

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