

A tale of survival of the human spirit. Mary Godwin, a journalist in NYC, witnesses a terrorist incident at The Freedom Tower. Her fiancé Percy Shelley fails her. Stalked by a psychotic, she falls for a cop helping her. Who lives and dies?

TERRORIZED IN NEW YORK CITY

By William A Chanler

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TERRORIZED IN NEW YORK CITY

How will Mary survive a terrorist, a stalker
and her fiancé's infidelity?



William A Chanler

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Chapter 1

Spring is supposed to be a time of renewal, revival, hope, and love. Flowers bloom, wither and die. People are born and die every second of every day. Some deaths are natural, others are not.

On a warming April morning, Mary Godwin jogged up Fifth Avenue, breathing easily, her mind on her boyfriend, Percy Shelley. *This morning was the first time that Percy didn't even try to make me stay in bed with him. He almost seemed relieved when I told him that I had to go for a jog. What's going on? Is he growing bored with me? Am I not adventurous enough in bed? Is that it? Why am I blaming myself anyway?*

Mary had been sleeping over at his apartment for a few months. It wasn't exactly a move-in situation as she only had part of her wardrobe there. Most of her clothes were still at her parents' luxury four-story townhouse on East 64th Street.

At 72nd Street, she turned sharply to her left and entered Central Park. The multi-lane road she jogged on was closed to vehicles because it was Saturday. The foot traffic was still light at 7:49 AM. Bicyclists, walkers, joggers and serious runners training for the New York Marathon all shared the spacious urban park.

Most of the men and a few women looked her over more than once, admiring her shoulder length brown hair, pretty face, and slender body. Mary had caught more than one person checking out her firm butt. She was a little annoyed by it but satisfied, too. Being ogled was noninvasive to her and much more acceptable than having her picture taken by some jerk so that it could be posted on social media.

At the moment, Mary was oblivious to the smiles and leers and everything else around her. Her face had a determined, neutral expression while her mind remained focused on Percy. *When I moved in to his place after announcing out engagement, he couldn't keep his hands and body off me. It was really nice. Did I ever see love in those beautiful dark eyes of his? Or was it only a reflection of the hunger he felt for my body?*

But he proposed to me with that beautiful poem he wrote for the occasion. And he was on his knees. And the candlelight. It was so romantic. Doesn't that prove he loves me? Or did then.

Mary tried to dispel any self-doubt by focusing her green eyes on the constantly moving landscape scene around her and soaking in the sunrays. Calmness, self-confidence, and good humor replaced the brief tug of despair. She wanted to spread her arms like an eagle in acknowledgement of her appreciation of wellbeing but didn't want to risk being mocked or photographed for posterity. Instead, she settled for doing it in her mind and in doing so brightened the world with her captivating smile.

She knew the songwriter her entire life. The Shelleys and Godwins summered in Dark Harbor, an enclave on Islesboro Maine, located in picturesque Penobscot Bay. Their six-year age difference was steep to keep them in separate circles until fairly recently. Now, their friends overlapped. Their paths also crossed at the tennis and yacht clubs as well as the must attend large parties in the wealthy summer community.

Then last summer, Percy made the moves on her. She was initially cautious, not because the age disparity, but due to his reputation as a lady's man. He had swept a number of beautiful women off their feet because of his good looks, old money, and smooth talking. Percy often sweet talked the objects of his desire with impromptu poems.

Mary was not naïve. She knew what to expect from him and decided that one date would be harmless enough. An hour into their

picnic on a nearby island, she found herself laying on her back returning his eager advances. It had been a fun date until a jealous intruder cut short their romantic outing.

They continued seeing one another, mostly at his spacious summer house and then last fall in Manhattan. The couple shared a passion for writing and the theater scene. Mary was an investigative journalist at Manhattan Magazine, which was published by her father, William Godwin. Her pet topic was how the city was dealing with the rising Atlantic Ocean. She feared that entire blocks and neighborhoods would eventually have to be permanently abandoned, possibly even in her lifetime.

Percy was a gifted theatrical songwriter. Just yesterday, he promised Mary that a Tony award would adorn the mantel within a year. Most of the songs were written during daily solo jam sessions on the piano in the spacious living room. A few songs for the musical he was working on were complete, copyrighted, and ready to go.

Mary, half way through her run, was unaware of her fiancé's private audition planned for later that day.

Mary jogged past a man standing in the shadow of an elm tree. He intently gazed at his phone. Not noticing him, she was completely

unaware of being filmed. The man wore a cap pulled low over his forehead that managed to hide the disturbing expression on his face.

She looks ripe for the picking. Young enough and fine boned, not that I'm that particular. Yeah, she's a keeper. Add her to the friggin' list of contenders. The winner will get special treatment from yours truly. Something permanent. A one-way ticket to hell.

Thinking about what he would do to her excited him even after the young woman had disappeared around a bend in the road. He saved the footage, pocketed the camera, and departed in the opposite direction.

Mary continued on, heading uptown to the Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis Reservoir in the northern quadrant of Central Park. Occasionally glancing at a digital pedometer, she joined a steady stream of runners circling counterclockwise around the scenic body of water. After a lap, she drank deeply at a water fountain and exited the park at East 90th Street.

Her skin glistened with sweat as she slowed to a fast, energetic walk down Fifth Avenue, the long home stretch. Mary was totally unaware that the satisfaction she felt would soon end.

Chapter 2

Mary paused a beat as the doorman opened the front door for her. She greeted him by name with a smile and strode into the ornate lobby and walked toward the elevator.

She was relieved to have the elevator to herself. The dried sweat and body odor made her feel gross. Staying fit and thin did not come easily. She had to work at it, subconsciously urged on by her boyfriend. Percy always favored beautiful, slender women, pushing Mary to eat sparingly and work out every day possible.

The elevator stopped on the 12th floor. The door quietly slid open and Mary stepped out into a private foyer. The front door to the apartment lay directly ahead. She turned the knob to see if the door was locked. Percy occasionally left the apartment unlocked when he went out. Mary thought he was too cavalier about security.

This time, she was quietly displeased that the door was locked because she customarily did not bring keys when going for a jog.

Didn't I leave the door unlocked when I went out two hours ago?

Mary rang the doorbell, slightly peeved to have to do so. Seconds later, she heard the telltale click of the lock being disengaged. The door opened and there stood Percy Shelley, dressed in a silk bathrobe. Mary knew every inch of Percy's body, but still was in awe of his beautiful face. She beheld his disheveled curly brown hair, mesmerizing dark blue eyes, longish nose and inviting mouth that she desired that instant to kiss. *We can talk later.*

"You look hot," Percy said with a wry inviting smile.

"I am," she replied hoarsely, stepping forward and leaning into Percy. She felt him respond as they slowly moved toward their bedroom.

Twenty minutes later, they lay on their sides, facing one another. Mary felt content for the time being. She knew that her lover often enjoyed love talk until they were ready for another go round of lovemaking. Mary occasionally obliged, but only when she had nothing else to do. She did, in fact, have someplace to go.

Mary stared into Percy's sparkling eyes. "You called me your love bird," she said softly, a finger stroking the underside of his elbow. "Does that make you my song bird?"

The songwriter laughed. “Well, I hope so. I am that.”

“I like that song you played last night.”

“Thanks.” His eyes drifted away, his mind seemingly elsewhere. “It’s one of my better efforts. I have high hopes for it.”

“Where are you?” Mary asked. She read people very well. And she also knew when someone was being deceitful.

Percy frowned. “Why right here, of course.”

“Your mind was somewhere elsewhere. I know it.”

“Oh, I was thinking about that song you asked me about.” Not waiting for a reply, he kissed her passionately. The sudden and unexpected ardor had the desired effect of distracting Mary from the suspicion that he was possibly hiding something from her.

Mary had the willpower to pull back from Percy at the last moment. She pushed him off her and sat up.

Percy glared. “Why did you do that? We’re engaged to be married, for God’s sake.”

“God has nothing to do with my reason. Being engaged does not mean that I have to agree to make love whenever you want.”

“Wow! What’s come over you, Mary?”

Mary stood, hands on hips, on the opposite side of the king-sized bed from Percy.

“I’m only reacting to you,” she declared.

“Me? What are you talking about?”

“Something’s different. Something’s changed. Don’t tell me you don’t know it. That would be an insult.”

Mary waited for a truthful response. She noticed Percy’s expression change from perplexed to guilt to a blank poker face. That was when she decided that it was time to go out. It would give her an opportunity to think some more about their relationship. There was an iconic place that she had not yet visited – the Observatory on top of the Freedom Tower. She had wanted to go with Percy. But she wasn’t in the mood to be with him until he came clean with whatever stood between them.

“Listen, I’m going to take a shower, then go out.”

He frowned and nodded.

Mary sighed, then headed to the bathroom as Percy stood, watching her.

Clean and dressed, Mary felt somewhat better, but was still agitated by Percy's attitude. She found him seated at the grand piano. He looked up, smiling thinly as she approached him.

"Don't you even care where I'm going?"

"Of course I do," he replied heatedly and a bit defensively. "Where then?"

"The observatory at the Freedom Tower."

"The view is supposed to be really amazing there. Have fun."

Mary held his uncertain gaze, wondering what to say and do. She knew that, left unresolved, their little spat would fester. That was not her style. She preferred to get to the heart of the matter quickly.

Taking the initiative, she moved closer to Shelley. "Do you want to come with me?" she asked softly.

"Honestly, I do. But I have a deadline, I'm afraid. I need to stay here and work. Sorry."

Mary, troubled, watched Shelley avoid her eyes. "See you later," she said morosely. They always kissed and hugged each other whenever parting company, but not then. She abruptly turned around and walked out.

Shelley watched her leave, shook his head, and muttered to himself, "Here goes."

Mary hoped the episode with Percy was only a minor tiff that would be wiped clean that evening. She fully expected they would kiss and make up. Usually strong and radiating abundant positive energy, she decided to enjoy the rest of the day.

Chapter 3

One World Trade Center, proudly known by American patriots and others as the Freedom Tower, stood on the footprint of the twin towers of the World Trade Center. The history of the world was altered when terrorists destroyed the adjoining buildings on September 11, 2001, the day of infamy known as 9/11.

People from all around the globe considered it an honor to go to the National September 11 Memorial, set in the shadow of the tower. Mary took pictures of the two reflecting pools. After pocketing her phone, she read the names of the victims inscribed on the edges of both pools. The experience both saddened and angered her.

Mary was fiercely proud of the city, blemishes and all. Mary was aware that she stood a few blocks from a street battle between Union Army soldiers and street gangs during the Civil War. The city had seen riots and additional discord during its four-hundred-year history.

Yet her hometown was undoubtedly a world capital; a magnificent business and cultural center.

Mary stood expectantly in line to take the elevator up to One World Observatory. She had seen videos of the ride and couldn't wait to see for herself if it was the amazing experience that it was supposed to be.

Mary stepped into the Skypod that would take her up to the 102nd floor.

The forty-seven second ride was a thrilling experience for people of all ages. It began below ground within the heart of the tallest building in the Western Hemisphere. Then the door shut tight and the computer animated LED program began. She and the other dozen passengers first saw bedrock around them, then as the Skypod quickly cleared ground level they beheld a clear day with a view of a thriving 16th Century Native American village on the west bank of Manhattan. The view of Manhattan changed, showing the evolving history of the island. A few seconds into the experience, she stared down at the Dutch settlement of New Amsterdam at the southern tip of Manhattan.

Mary witnessed the growth of the city, sweeping north, and gradually higher as taller buildings were constructed. She gawked,

transfixed, at the panoramic scene. Toward the end of the multidimensional experience, the steel frames of the skyscraping tower rose majestically high above the cityscape. Then, finally, the cab appeared to be surrounded by solid walls as the elevator arrived at the observatory.

Not everybody was mesmerized by the spectacle. One man with a book bag dangling from a shoulder cast a fleeting eye at the other passengers, finally settling on Mary with a look of recognition. Mary was too hypnotized by the thrilling experience to notice the disturbed expression on the man's face.

Disembarking, Mary felt uplifted, yet disappointed. *It was perhaps more than my brain could absorb. I really want to experience the trip in slow motion to see every change in the city's skyline.* Unfortunately, that was not possible. Perhaps she would return again soon, the next time with Percy. He hated fast moving elevators, but perhaps the feast for the eyes would enable him to forget his fear.

The bearded man followed Mary off the elevator. His dark eyes searched for the sign for the men's bathroom. He remained vigilant as the tour group slowly moved forward. The pace made him uneasy. As he stepped past the welcome area, the desired sign loomed ahead

on the right side of the corridor. He pushed his way to the right side of the herd, brashly brushing past people before entering the lavatory.

He ignored the polite nod of a fellow bathroom patron and stepped into the wide stall reserved for handicapped people. He rammed the latch on the door closed, put the toilet seat down and lowered the bag on it. The man quickly unzipped his trousers and hung it on the door hook. He removed his briefs and placed them over the trousers. The undergarment fell to the floor almost immediately.

“Ya Ibn el Sharmouta!” he cursed, picking up the underpants. Glaring, he listened for any activity. The bathroom was quiet. “Alḥamdulillāh,” he said, patting his heart a few times.

He then removed sheer leggings and set to work shredding them. The narrow strips were folded and stuffed into the bag. He saved the most important task for last. Holding his mouth compressed tightly, he reached down to his shaved thigh with both hands and ripped off a wide strip of tape. He quickly grabbed a 3D printed plastic gun with his other hand. Releasing a gust of sour hot air, he made sure the pistol was operational.

A short time later, the stall door opened and the Arab-speaking man quickly exited the bathroom.

Mary, despite attempts to block him out of her mind, thought about Percy as she toured the crowded observatory. She occasionally stepped over one of the huge windows to take pictures of the panoramic views of New York Harbor, New Jersey, the Hudson River, and the five boroughs of the City of New York. The clear blue sky also permitted her to see Long Island, Westchester County and Connecticut just below the horizon.

She lowered her gaze almost directly down at the ground 1,250 feet below her. Ant-sized people milled around the two rectangular pools.

“Don’t touch the window,” a woman near Mary pleaded. “If the glass breaks, you’ll fall to your death.”

Mary tore her eyes away from the mesmerizing spectacle and turned around. An adolescent girl stood nearby, leaning forward against the ultra-clear glass that separated her from oblivion. She stood on a heating panel that circumvented the base of the window. The girl grinned at Mary as if she was her ally. Mary looked at the frantic older woman who seemed afraid to step near the window. *She must be afraid of heights. The elevator ride must have been terrifying for her. She must really love her daughter.*

“Please, Lauren, don’t tempt fate.”

“Tell my mother there’s nothing to worry about,” the teenager told Mary.

As Mary opened her mouth to tell the girl that she was being immature and foolish, a male uniformed security person approached. “Please step away from the window.”

“It’s a free country, isn’t it?” the girl replied snidely, craning her head around.

“I’ll have to escort you to the elevator if you refuse to cooperate,” the man warned.

Mary sized up the security man, an analytical skill she’d been honing since beginning her career as an investigative journalist. He was about thirty-five, slightly overweight, and wore his hair in a military haircut. She observed a walkie-talkie unit secured to his belt, a baton, mace, and a holstered pistol. *Just like NYPD. What could go wrong here? Everyone went through the security checkpoint before boarding the elevators.*

Her sharp eyes noticed a familiar looking man with a black beard staring at the security officer from about twenty feet away. He looked furtively around him, then removed an eyeglass case from a small book bag hanging on a shoulder. The man quickly removed a canister from it, closed the eyeglass case and placed it back in the canvas bag.

Lauren sullenly stepped down from the baseboard radiator. She stepped over to uniformed man. “Hi,” she said, smiling provocatively.

“You should listen to your mother,” he replied.

“Thanks a lot!”

An alarm went off in Mary’s brain as she stared, eyebrows scrunched, at the bearded man. *Something bad is going to happen.* “Officer, look behind you,” she said quietly and urgently.

“What?” he said, swiveling his head toward Mary.

The suspicious behaving man moved in quickly, glaring for an instant at Mary. He harshly pushed the mother and daughter out of the way. They crashed to the hard floor.

The shocked guard blinked, a look of evident disbelief on his face because of what was suddenly happening to his normally uneventful day. He reacted too slowly.

The assailant raised the black canister in his right hand, extended the arm, and aimed the nozzle at the security man’s eyes. Moving his hand slightly from left to right, a jet of pepper spray struck both orbs in two seconds.

The guard, screaming, clutched his tormented eyes. As if that was not enough, his testicles received a swift brutal kick. The unfortunate

man crashed on the floor, his body curled protectively in the fetal position, writhing in agony. His hands helplessly moved back and forth from his eyes to his groin area.

Having subdued the security man so easily, the assailant threw the canister in his shoulder bag, put a hand in his pants pocket, grabbed the homemade pistol, and pulled it out for everybody to see. He victoriously waved it around.

The milling crowd stampeded, many of the women screaming in terror. A few fast-thinking individuals shot videos of the aftermath, training their phones on the injured guard, the attacker, Mary, Lauren and Lauren's stunned mother. Closed-circuit surveillance cameras, monitored by NYPD, also recorded the incident.

"You!" the terrorist shouted at Mary. "I know you, don't I," he said excitedly.

"Me?" Mary answered, trying to sound calm and not to show how terrified she was. *Has he seen my picture on the magazine's website or on social media?*

The terrorist beckoned her to him with a movement of the gun, his eyes quickly glancing everywhere. Then, impatiently, he grabbed her with his free hand. "Turn around now."

Mary hesitated.

He roughly spun her around, pressing her against his stomach and pelvis. He wrapped an arm around her snugly and paused, slightly out of breath.

“Tell me where I’ve seen your face or you’ll be sent to the hell of all disbelievers!” the terrorist exclaimed angrily.

Mary felt spittle on her face. “Please don’t,” she replied, her heart racing.

“Do not tell me what to do. You are only a woman.”

I’m only a woman? Who is this chauvinist pig?

She gasped when the grip tightened. “All right, I’m sorry if I misspoke.” The words came out garbled through the gag over her mouth.

The man stepped over, Ellen in tow, and moved the cloth so Mary could be understood. “Tell me now!”

“Perhaps you’ve seen me on my magazine’s website.”

The man probed her face with his eyes before nodding. “You speak the truth. Sit down on the floor over there,” he ordered, pointing his head at the radiator panel. “Understand?”

“Yes,” Mary replied meekly.

Chapter 4

Mary sat near the window. The red-eyed security man, occasionally groaning, lay on the floor a few feet away. Lauren sat next to Mary. They were all bound and gagged. The girl stared blankly at the floor, seemingly in another world. Ellen, her mother, stood unsteadily in front of the terrorist, involuntarily acting as a human shield. Ellen's eyes were red from crying. They flickered wildly in search of deliverance, for some sign that the nightmare would soon end.

Their shattered phones lay on the floor nearby, all smashed by their kidnapper. Mary occasionally glanced at her device, hoping that the stored data could be salvaged.

The man, who would later be described by law enforcement agencies as a lone wolf, smiled disdainfully at Mary and Lauren, while keeping an arm around Ellen's waist.

Mary regarded him with steely determination. He laughed at her.

“You think you’re better than me, don’t you! You tell lies just like all the media in this God forsaken country of yours. You are all stupid. America needs to be punished for interfering in the lives of the honorable people who love the great prophet Mohammed.”

Mary tried to block out the hateful words of her abductor. She looked away from the man, scanning the ceilings and walls. *There! A surveillance camera! Someone must be monitoring the nightmare. At least I hope so.*

Her eyes noticed something else. A stairwell door was slightly open. *Is it possible? Are the police here?* She peeked at the terrorist. Luckily, he wasn’t then watching her at that moment. Mary made a supreme effort not to look jubilant. *I’ve got to look as desperate as I feel. He must not know what I know or I’ll get us all killed.*

Two armored and helmeted cops stood unseen by everyone except Mary, a hundred feet away, watching the lone wolf from a stairwell landing. One spoke quietly on a portable radio attached to the top of his bulletproof vest.

Mary made sure the terrorist wasn’t looking her way, then nodded imperceptively at them. One of the police officers gave her a thumbs up. Mary looked again at the assailant and caught him watching her. Her heart caught in her throat. *Oh no!*

The fanatic spun around quickly, gun pointed straight ahead, forcibly dragging and injuring Ellen.

“You,” he shouted at the policemen. “I want one of you devils to walk over to me real slow. No sudden moves or I break this woman’s neck.” He tightened his grip on Ellen’s neck.

She raised her arms weakly in a vain attempt to try to loosen his hold.

“Put your arms down, woman,” he warned through clenched teeth.

They dropped weakly to her sides.

Mary tried to speak through her gag. “You’re hurting her.” The words were barely understandable.

Her abductor laughed in response. He dared not look at her, in case doing so would tempt NYPD to take immediate action.

Ellen emitted gargled sounds through her gasping mouth.

He stared wickedly at the indecisive police officers.

“If you want her dead, stay where you are. It means nothing to me. Or you can bring me water now.”

After some discussion and activity, one of the police officers approached, carrying a bottle of water.

“Arms up, pig!” shouted the hostage taker.

The policeman strode forward, one hand free, the other grasping the bottle.

The security guard mumbled something incoherently through the gag.

The kidnapper turned his head toward him for a second. “I will shoot you if you don’t shut up!” He angrily turned his attention again on the approaching cop.

Both men immersed themselves in a stare down like two gunslingers of the Wild West. The stakes were unknown in this instance, but possibly critical to how the drama played out.

Ellen watched hopefully as her potential rescuer stepped tantalizingly closer. She was dead on her feet from being forced to stand for so long and having to endure the horrid man’s touch. Her eyes pleaded for help. But the cop barely looked at her. She suddenly went limp.

The unexpected burden of Ellen’s buckled body caught the terrorist off guard. He struggled to maintain his balance and hold her up. He overcompensated for the sudden weight load by excessively tightening the grip on her neck. There was an audible snap.

“Shit!” he cried out. He dropped the corpse on the hard floor and stared with sudden fear at the policeman holding the water bottle.

The policeman dropped the water bottle and surged ahead at full speed. The terrorist began to raise the gun when the cop tackled him.

Mary and Lauren, seemingly frozen in place, watched the nearby struggle as the two men crashed on the floor.

The athletic, well trained cop smashed the terrorist’s gun hand on the floor. The impact propelled it from his hand. The cop then tasered the man, sending him into convulsions and his mouth frothing.

Two more heavily armed cops surged forward, assault rifles aimed at the unconscious man. The lethal weapons were armed with rubber bullets to prevent the heavy-duty bulletproof windows from cracking.

Lauren, still bound, managed to get on her knees. Chest heaving, she stared at her mother’s body in shock. Her silent reaction quickly ceased when she began screaming through the cloth. A cop quickly strode over to her and removed the hand and mouth restraints. The girl’s breath caught in her throat when she noticed the dead eyes gazing up at nothingness. The new orphan dropped to her knees, crying heavily.

Mary, just unfettered, peered at Lauren. She shuddered. *Poor girl. How awful! What a nightmare!* She resolutely stepped over knelt beside her. “Come here,” she urged. Lauren, shuddering, allowed herself to be embraced by Mary.

“I’m so sorry.”

Lauren looked at her, teardrops spilling down her pale face. “My mom is dead,” she blurted.

Mary arms remained wrapped around her Lauren. Lauren’s arms remained at her sides as she continued crying.

The terrorist was grabbed by two members of NYPD’s elite ESU Unit known as the A-Team. He was shoved face down on the floor, tightly handcuffed with both hands behind him, and roughly lifted again to his feet. Then he was given the Miranda warning by the arresting police officer.

Mary wanted to record a video of the takedown and subsequent events, but she didn’t want to abandon Lauren. She looked over Lauren’s head as the rights were issued to the hostage taker.

“You have the right to remain silent. Anything you say can and will be used against you in a court of law. You have the right to an attorney. If you cannot afford an attorney, one will be provided for you. Do you understand the rights I have told you? With these rights in mind, do you wish to speak to me?”

The prisoner raised his head and glared at the cops. “Take those fucking handcuffs off me, you fascist pig!” Then, looking at Mary, he sneered, “You should write about me. I’ll make you famous.”

“She’s not going to do a damn thing until you acknowledge the rights that I just read to you. Understand me?” the cop hotly said. He shook his head slightly at Mary.

“Okay,” the man shouted. “I understand!”

“Calm down now buddy,” he was told.

The handcuffed man, eyes flickering between his captor and Mary, relaxed a little bit.

A policeman in civilian clothes strode over to Mary and Lauren. He solemnly peered down at the Ellen’s body. Anger crossed his face for an instant. He then scowled at Ellen’s killer, looking like he wanted to beat the man to a pulp. But he managed to get control of himself and look questioningly at Mary.

“You both related to her?”

“I’m not. Lauren here is Ellen’s daughter.”

“I’m sorry for your loss,” he said compassionately.

Lauren, sniffing, nodded at him.

“I saw my mother die,” she blurted.

“I’m sorry, Lauren. I have to speak to your friend now.”

Lauren nodded blankly at the cop.

“I’ll be right back, Lauren,” Mary soothingly said, a hand on Lauren’s arm.

“Are you sure?” Lauren asked, desperation in her eyes.

“I promise.” Mary glanced at the man. He nodded, projecting a small smile at Lauren. Then Mary followed him, as a policewoman, in body armor, went to Lauren and spoke to her.

They stopped about fifty feet away. “Is it true you’re a writer?”

“Guilty as charged. I’m Mary Godwin with *Manhattan Magazine*.”

“Ah.” He paused, looking pensively at her. “You going to do as the perp said and write about him?”

Mary smiled in spite of herself. She looked quickly at the officer’s name tag. “I came here as a sightseer, Sergeant Marston. But now I’m part of a tragic news story. Even so, I suppose that I shouldn’t pass up on the opportunity. He,” glancing at the handcuffed man, “has invited me to interview him. Is it okay to ask him a few questions here or do I have to wait until he’s been booked?”

“He’s been Mirandaed. If he’s still willing to talk, go right ahead.”

“Has he been ID’d?”

“He’s not cooperating with us. Perhaps he’ll open up with you. Are you game?”

Mary had never interviewed a convicted felon or an enemy of the United States. She briefly wondered if she was about to put herself on a terrorist hit list. She swallowed nervously. *I won’t get anywhere by chickening out.* “Sure, let’s do it.”

She immediately thought about her phone, wondering if it was operable after being smashed. *Wait one minute! I have something else!* The journalist reached into her jeans pocket and snatched the small digital audio recorder that she’d concealed from the terrorist. It featured an in-built microphone and a backlit LCD display.

Marston nodded encouragingly. “You’ll do fine, Miss Goodwin. We have your back.”

“It’s Godwin, not Goodwin.”

“Godwin. I’ll make a point to remember your name for the rest of my life,” Marston gravely replied with sparkling eyes.

Mary smirked. *I hope he’s not flirting with me after what has happened here. He seems nice though.* “Thanks, I guess.”

Marston nodded, then turned around, and stepped toward the apprehended terrorist. Mary kept pace a few steps behind him.

Mary fed off Marston's confidence and quiet strength. The young journalist was surprised to discover that the tension and apprehension had mostly melted away, at least for the time being. Her mind feverishly worked out the questions she'd ask her former abductor. *Who are you? Why did you kidnap us? What's your objective? Who ordered you to do this or did you do it in your own misguided way? Easy now. I can't make him angry or he'll clam up.*

In what seemed like no time, Mary stood facing the man. She tried to shake off images and sounds of the violence he had committed. She again heard Ellen's neck break and her body drop on the floor and Lauren's mournful grieving. *Come on now. I'll be a disgrace to the magazine if I don't shape up. I must focus.*

Mary gathered herself. She observed the killer's eyes watching her.

"You finally ready or do I need to find a man to write about me?"

The insult increased her motivation and burned inside her. Sensing that he wanted to maintain the upper hand and provoke her, Mary did her best to act cool, calm, and collected, an almost unsurmountable task after the recent ordeal.

"Perhaps we should sit first. It will be better that way. Do you mind?" she asked him, glancing at Marston?

“That’s not a good idea,” Marston said, standing protectively near Mary, his full attention on the perpetrator.

Mary fidgeted with the recorder.

The man frowned at the device. “I did not agree to this.”

“You consented to an interview. This is how it is done,” Mary replied, almost hoping the man would call it off. She looked demurely at him, hoping her attitude would encourage him to proceed.

He shrugged. “Okay, go ahead.”

She pressed PLAY and asked the first question. “What’s your name?”

“Abu Musab Ali. What’s yours?”

“You don’t have to answer that,” Marston advised her.

Mary didn’t think revealing her identity would endanger her life. In any case, her name would appear in black ink as the writer of the magazine article. “That’s okay,” she said, looking up at Marston for an instant before carefully regarding Abu Musab Ali. “My name is Mary Godwin. I work at *Manhattan Magazine*.”

“Ah yes. That’s right.” Abu watched her bemusedly. “I will look for you on Twitter. You write very good.”

Oh no! I wonder what other evil people are following me. Then again, perhaps it is best that I don't know.

“So tell me about yourself. Where were you born?”

“Brooklyn,” he said smugly.

“Really. Why would someone from Brooklyn do what you did here today?”

“Number one, I am a Muslim. I am lost in Brooklyn, lost in America. God is not here.”

“God being Allah?”

“Yes, very good. The real truth is that only true believers will be admitted to Heaven. All others, whether Christian, Jew, Buddhist or those who are Shiite or Sunni in name only won't be admitted. All Muslims who are unwilling to die for God will never make it past the holy gate into Heaven. Only those of us willing to live and die by the sword in the creation of a pure Islamic State will be spared. Nearly everybody living in this land of the infidels is my sworn enemy. I am sad to admit that you are one, too.”

“We don't have to be enemies, do we?” *How do I rationalize with him?*

He laughed. His upper body began to rock forward and back, forward and back. His dark eyes drilled into hers like laser beams.

Mary steeled herself into showing she wouldn't back off. "Do you sympathize with those radicals who are slaughtering innocent people, including cutting heads off prisoners during public executions?"

"They do what is right and just, Allah be praised!"

"You're talking about ISIS."

He smiled proudly.

"The vast majority of Muslims do not believe in committing atrocities. You know that you are outnumbered by millions of reasonable, peace loving Muslim people."

"They will die. You will, too."

"Hey, that's enough. No more threats or the interview is over," Marston warned, glaring at the terrorist.

Mary appreciated the interruption. She pressed on. "You talk about death a lot. Abu, do you want to die?"

"Death will make me a martyr. So death is good. It's what I do now and later that will swell the number of young people that join us. Allah be praised!"

"And merciful?"

Abu smirked at Mary.

She continued. “It might surprise you that I’ve read the Koran. One passage really struck me. ‘Whoever kills an innocent human being, it shall be as if he has killed all mankind, and whosoever saves the life of one, it shall be as if he had saved the life of all mankind,’” Mary finished. She felt like she was making progress.

Amu glared at her. He spat on the floor, and his upper torso rocked more aggressively.

Mary looked up at Marston. “I think I’m done.” She was about to turn off the recorder when the interviewee spoke.

“I’m not finished with you yet,” Abu Musab Ali said angrily. He attempted to move closer to her, but the police officers on either side of him held him fast.

“No you don’t,” one of the cops gruffly told him.

Mary backed off a few steps, warily regarding the ISIS sympathizer. She wanted to get out of there and never see him again. But a journalist had to do whatever was necessary to obtain every bit of information from multiple points of view. *It’s my story. If I back off, my reputation will be irreparably damaged. Father will feel sorry for me. People in the office will avoid me. I’ll have to resign.* Thinking about the consequences of shirking her responsibility strengthened Mary’s determination to be the city’s finest young newswomen.

Mary bravely stepped closer to Abu. “We’ll talk again.” She then spoke to Marston. “Please put it in the record that I am available to visit Abu Musab Ali in Rikers Island or wherever he will be held.”

“Will do,” Marston replied, writing in his pad. Then he nodded at the prisoner’s escorts, signaling it was time to move. Marston whispered in Mary’s ear. “Good job. See you around.”

Mary felt the man’s breath go through her. She stood, watching him walk away.

* * *

Mary’s parents were home watching ongoing television coverage of the incident at One Trade Center when they were notified that Mary was identified as a witness. They immediately hailed a cab to take them downtown.

William Godwin was generally much calmer than his wife. Jane was more sensitive, more emotional. William was old school, controlling his reactions in public and slightly less so at home. He did not love Mary any less than Jane did, though the casual observer may have thought differently.

Their cab was half way to the Freedom Tower when William’s phone rang. He didn’t recognize the name on Caller ID, but took the call anyway. “Hello?” It was Mary. “Mary, are you okay?”

Jane looked over with teary eyes. “Tell her we are on our way.”

William put the call on speaker mode. “We’re on speaker, Mary. We’ll be at One World Trade Center in a few minutes.”

“Hello dear, are you okay?” Jane asked, edging closer to her husband to be closer to the phone.

Mary’s voice came through clearly. “I’m safe and uninjured, Mom and Dad. Sorry I couldn’t call you sooner. My phone is badly damaged. I’ll tell you more when you’re here.” She instructed them where to meet her, then signed off.

“Why couldn’t she talk longer?” Jane wondered.

“It doesn’t matter. We’ll be with her shortly,” William replied, looking out the window at the busy city.

Jane dabbed her eyes with a tissue. “I can’t let Mary see me like this. I must be strong.”

William smiled encouragingly at her. “You will be,” he replied hopefully.

* * *

A short time later, Mary was reunited with her parents in the bright, high-ceilinged lobby. Several dozen policemen and women either stood vigil or passed through the vast space. Some of them

peered outside the windows where a press conference would soon begin.

After exchanging hugs with both parents, even her father, Mary spoke to them. She was very tired and happy to be alive. "I'm fine, Mom and Dad. Thank you for being here."

"What an awful nightmare you've gone through. Are you really all right?" Jane asked, looking with concern at her daughter's pale and strained face.

"Mom, I'm fine."

"You don't look it."

Thanks Mom. She turned to her father. "I interviewed him. His name is Abu Musab Ali."

"Good for you," he replied. "You're planning to put it in the magazine?"

"Yes, I am. And I think he'll want to talk to me some more."

"That's my girl."

Jane frowned at her husband. "Will, tell her that it's too dangerous. Don't let her see that monster again."

"Jane, it's perfectly safe. He'll be trussed like a chicken."

“Don’t commit yourself just yet. Give it a day or two to decide,” Godwin told Mary. “You won’t be alone. You’ve got everybody at the magazine behind you. And NYPD will obviously keep you safe. Is Ali still upstairs?”

“No, he was taken away a few minutes before I called you.”

“Thank God,” Jane Godwin declared.

Mary noticed a woman stride into the lobby from outside and look over at her. She stopped a few feet away from the entrance and nodded at Mary.

“I’ve seen her before. Who is that?” Godwin asked Mary.

“Assistant US District Attorney Judy Green. She’s already been assigned to prosecute Abu Musab Ali. I’ve got to go now,” peering outside at the gathering multitude. I’m supposed to say a few words to the media. Thanks for coming down. See you guys later. I love you both.”

They said their farewells. Then Mary strode away. Her father pensively watched.

“I just realized that she may not be able to write that article after all,” he said.

Before exiting the building, Green told Mary that Abu Musab Ali was being booked and charged with first-degree murder, first-degree kidnapping and other charges. Then they stepped outside and were immediately greeted by a phalanx of cameras and reporters. Dozens of questions were shouted simultaneously before the two women even arrived at the podium.

Green was a favorite federal prosecutor of the United States District Attorney for the borough of Manhattan. She was a sharp interrogator and strategist. The 28-year-old AUSA supplemented her questions in court with suggestive body language and a mesmerizing smile to bewitch judges, juries, and whomever else she needed to persuade. She had already turned down job offers with several of the city's legal powerhouses.

Green gave a 150-watt smile to Mary while stepping up to the podium. Seeing Mary hesitate, she waved Mary over to her side. A police helicopter roared overhead as Green peered confidently at the huge assemblage of local, national and international news people in attendance for the hastily arranged press conference. She glanced briefly at a staff member who shook his head reproachfully at her. Green shrugged subtly and plunged into her remarks.

Mary wondered what the disapproving look was about. She discovered the answer several minutes later when an official vehicle

pulled up to the curb. Two grey-haired men climbed out, both dressed impeccably in tailored dark suits.

“Excuse us. Coming through.”

The crowd parted obediently and reverently, opening a lane for the new arrivals. They were VIPS, namely the Police Commissioner and the United States District Attorney.

Green stopped speaking as soon as she noticed the slightly peeved, determined looking men rapidly approach the podium. She stepped back deferentially; her smile greatly diminished.

Mary immediately comprehended what was happening. *It's not Green's press conference. She started it prematurely. The conniver.* Mary gave the Assistant US Attorney (AUSA) an approving nod. *She's got guts. I hope some of that rubs off on me.* Mary curtsied slightly at the two men. They nodded politely with recognition, both having been guests at her father's parties and well acquainted with Mary's insightful articles about the city.

A reported shouted out a question at Mary about her ordeal just as the men positioned themselves at the dais. She looked deferentially at the powerful officials. The US District Attorney whispered in her ear. “Go ahead, Mary. Step over to the microphones and answer the question now. I will act as your counsel if you get into trouble. But I am supremely confident you'll do fine.”

“Thank you, sir.” Mary’s heart pounded rapidly as she tightly grasped the hardwood podium and addressed her captive audience, knowing this was the defining moment of her relatively short life so far. Millions of television viewers, radio listeners, newspaper readers, and online media would know her name and form opinions about her, based entirely on her performance.

Mary cleared her throat and nodded at the expectant faces. She zeroed in on Tamara Rogers, a well-respected television reporter “Tamara, thank you for your question,” she began, noting the smile on Tamara’s face at being recognized and named.

She continued, her eyes slowly scanning the group. *I might as well plug Dad’s magazine.* “My name is Mary Godwin. I work at *Manhattan Magazine*. Today, I was an eyewitness and victim in yet another act of terrorism by an American born citizen. I will not and cannot go into the particulars because doing so could adversely affect the prosecution.” She looked down a moment to collect her thoughts before continuing.

“I am thankful to be able to stand before you now. But I am heartbroken that the life of a lovely woman was taken for no good reason.” Mary’s eyes moistened. She tried to control her emotions. “Terrorism must stop. I appeal to radicals to turn to constructive measures instead.” She nodded again at her audience. “Thank you.” She backed away from the dais.

“What about the FBI?” a reporter asked.

The Police Commissioner stepped up to the microphone, adjusted its angle, and spoke. “The FBI has already begun its investigation and will obviously pursue issues such as the radicalization of the perpetrator, Abu Musab Ali. The FBI will issue statements when appropriate. That’s all I will say now on the matter.” He covered the microphone while whispering with the US District Attorney (USDA).

Another reporter asked a question. “Commissioner, is ISIS connected to what happened in the Observatory?”

The Commissioner reacted with annoyance as he had declared that he had no more to say. But he fielded the question with evident reluctance. “I am not aware at this time that ISIS has acknowledged that the perpetrator is one of their own.” He promptly moved aside.

The USDA then edged to the podium.

“Only a short statement. We will prosecute Abu Musab Ali to the full extent of the law. Terrorists will get no safe haven in our great city. The United States v Abu Musab Ali will see to it. That is all.”

The podium was abandoned as a fury of questions ensued. The impromptu press conference was over. Mary watched Judy Green being reprimanded by her boss for beginning the press conference without him. The Assistant US Attorney nodded respectfully, yet Mary couldn’t help but notice the fire in her eyes.

Several news people made an effort to speak to Mary privately. She was normally very receptive to interacting with her peers. She sensed that this was not an appropriate time, especially after noticing Judy frown at her.

“Sorry but I have to go back inside,” Mary told her small audience. She quickly entered the lobby, half expecting to see her parents again. They weren’t there. Their absence both disappointed and relieved her. She briefly thought about Percy, thinking he must be worried sick about her.

Mary assumed she would be spending considerable time with the prosecuting attorney, beginning with the examination before trial in which Mary would go over every detail of her experience. Then there was the matter of her eventual court appearance, and the testimony she would be required to provide. Mary looked forward to seeing Green in action in court, but having to relive the terrible experience was too much for her to contemplate. Grimacing, she felt her blood pressure rise accompanied by discomfort in her stomach.

Mary was shaken out of her nightmare by repeated taps on her right shoulder and somebody repeating her name. She snapped to, noticing Judy Green watched her with concern.

“Do I dare ask what terrible place you were at?” Green asked.

“Actually I was thinking of you?”

“Really? How so?”

“I was dreading having to testify.”

“I know you’ll do fine. Listen Mary, I hope you know that you don’t expect to be releasing a magazine article right away about it.”

“No way!”

“Yeah, you’ll have to wait until a jury comes back with a verdict. Or perhaps longer, depending if it’s appealed by Abu Musab Ali’s defense team.

“Oh no!”

“Sorry. You must know deep inside that writing about it wouldn’t be permitted. It would be a conflict of interest and impair my case. The judge could potentially disallow your testimony.”

Mary’s disappointment was tempered by the faint hope that she could be excused from appearing in front of the judge and jury.

“Wipe that smile off your face, honey. Don’t even think for a second that you can weasel out of the legal proceedings. You were a principal player upstairs. If I don’t call you as a witness, the defense surely will. Do you understand?”

Mary sighed deeply. She nodded reprovingly, realizing she had lost out on a major career opportunity. Somebody else would write it.

“So if Abu Musab Ali wants me to interview him?”

“Sorry, Mary. You can’t.”

“That really sucks.”

“You’ll only have to pour your heart and soul into something else that will get your mind off it.”

Mary sighed deeply. “Right.”

She wondered what that would be.

Chapter 5

Howard Peters sat down on the living room couch and turned on the television. He surfed different channels with the remote before selecting a news channel. He spiked a couple of asparagus spears and raised the fork to his mouth while listlessly watching a recap of the lone wolf incident down at One World Trade Center. His dark, cruel eyes watched Mary at the news conference. He stopped chewing, absorbed by what he saw on the flat screen.

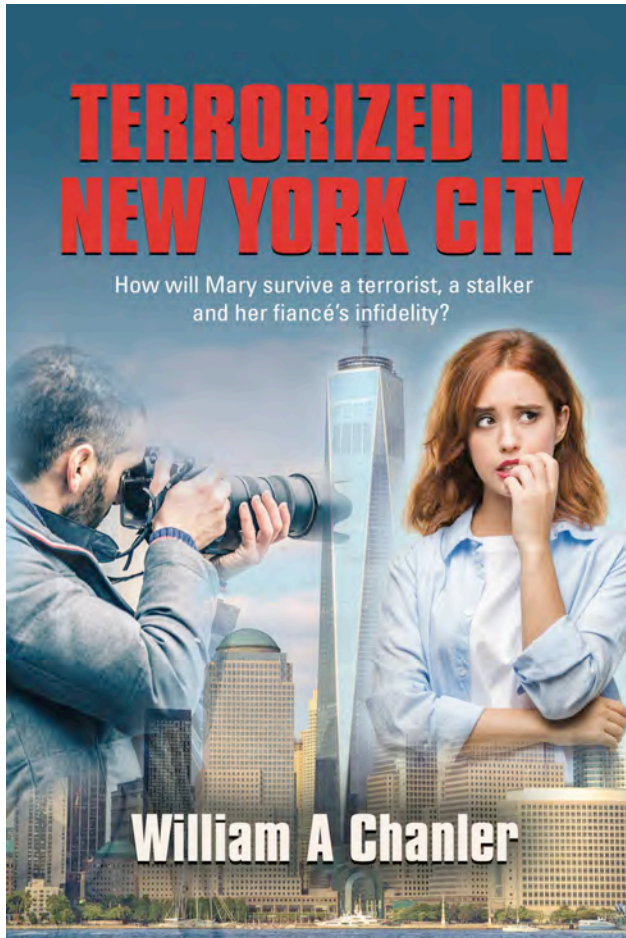
“Did I or did I not see that bitch in the park today? I did, didn’t I? It’s gotta be her. I’ll check the camera later, but I’m frigging sure it was her. Look at her standing there like she thinks she knows anything about suffering. She hasn’t a clue. Wait until I give her the special treatment.”

Peters licked his lips and shut up. He replayed her one minute at the podium over and over, memorized her voice, her poise, her face and yes indeed, the shape of her slender, vibrant looking body. He

turned off the television and continued staring at the screen, not really seeing it.

“She’ll do just fine. I’ll teach her all about pain and suffering. She’ll be able to write a dissertation on the subject by the time we’re done. But she’ll never get it published.”

He speared more asparagus, shoved it in his mouth, and chewed thoughtfully.



A tale of survival of the human spirit. Mary Godwin, a journalist in NYC, witnesses a terrorist incident at The Freedom Tower. Her fiancé Percy Shelley fails her. Stalked by a psychotic, she falls for a cop helping her. Who lives and dies?

TERRORIZED IN NEW YORK CITY

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