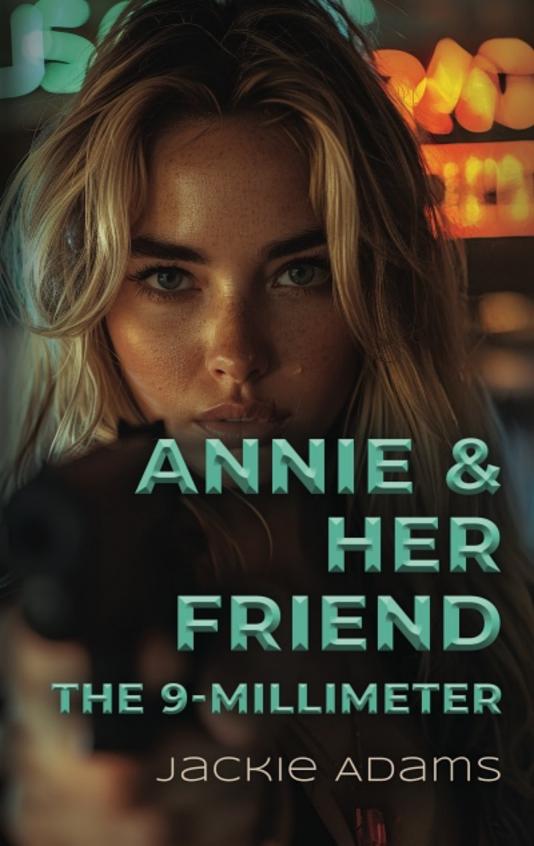


What happens when you go from being a bullied child in a small town, to a murderer in a big city? What happens when the murderer returns to the small town?

Annie & Her Friend the 9-Millimeter By Jackie Adams

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Chapter 1

I'm in New York City at present. I'm originally from Southern Missouri, but sometimes life calls us other places. This time is one of them. I'm walking down Main which is a very congested street. Traffic is jammed, vehicles are honking, people are crabbily pushing past each other. That's when I see him. I see my target.

His name is Mark Lanchester. He's taller than I remember and definitely taller than the photograph portrays. It will make this shot much easier for me. I take a few steps closer, wanting to be next to him and praying the bullet doesn't go through him and hit somebody else in the process.

I'm wearing a black trench. It's perfect for disguising my 9-Millimeter suppressor pistol I am holding on to underneath my coat. This will be simple and clean. As I walk past him quickly, I simply point the barrel out and take my shot. Then I keep walking as if nothing happened at all.

I don't know if the people around us heard the shot when the first scream took place or if it was caused by Mark Lanchester falling to the ground. What I do know is I'm far enough from Mark now that I don't have to worry about it! Nor will his victims, the girlfriend and five-year-old daughter, have to worry about him anymore. I smile, hail a cab, and dab on

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some lipstick as the driver takes me to my south side apartment.

I climb all three flights of stairs cursing myself for not finding an apartment with an elevator. It wasn't the money. I make enough. It seemed like a good idea at the time, stairs. I told myself it would be daily exercise. Let's just say I've grown to despise my decision making. I climb the last two and go to unlock my door when it pushes open. Someone's here. I only have one friend, and it's underneath my trench.

I take out my phone when I'm pulled inside my apartment with the phone and gun knocked out of my hands. I'm blindfolded and gagged. My ass lands so hard on a chair that my butt cheeks sting.

A deep male voice says, "I'm not here to hurt you." I hear him pull a chair close to mine as someone else's footsteps back away. The male voice continues, "I need you to listen without talking or I wouldn't have gagged you. I know what you've done, and I know what you just did. Now I need you to do me a favor. It's not a choice, so don't think it is. Before I leave, Manny here will have a folder on your desk with a description. The money is in the envelope next to it. It's more than enough to cover your expenses. I'm sure you haven't made New York City your home. Relocation for you shouldn't be a problem." He traces his finger over my cheek.

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I tilt my head away from his hand, his voice. Feeling sickened. How??? How does he know anything? I'm always very careful. Who is he??? What does he mean he's not here to cause me any harm? My ass wouldn't agree.

"All you have to do is complete this job. After, you'll see another envelope with cash for completing it. It'll be more than enough for you to retire. You should count yourself lucky we ever considered you of the three."

When he stops talking, I think, lucky? To be sitting here exposed, while I'm gagged and blindfolded. Three? Who are the other two? Where are the other two?

He continues, "Manny will be keeping a close eye on you, as he has since your arrival. If you complete this job, we'll no longer be acquaintances! We will go our separate ways. I need you to do it clean. Don't draw any attention to yourself." I hear the chair scrape the wood floor as he stands. "That is all." I hear him walk toward the door with who I assume is Manny. "Wait, there is one more thing. If you don't do this, I'll be sure to expose the crimes you've done. Believe me, you don't want to make the mistake of testing me." I hear the door open and both men step outside.

They're going to leave me here. Like this??? I start to wiggle my hands that are tied in front of me. It feels like rope. I think I can squirm them out. By the time I do I take off my blindfold and spit out my gag. I grab my pistol off the floor

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running to the door; they're gone. I run out in the hall and look down the stairs. No-one. I run over to my window, and all I see is the regular car and foot traffic. "Damn!"

I bolt my door from the inside, set my pistol on the hall table, and walk over to my desk where the folder is. A part of me is dying to know what is inside it, and the other part doesn't want anything to do with it. I've been on my own since losing my daddy. I'm not used to taking orders, especially from someone who is too cowardly to face me eye to eye. Instead, I walk into my kitchen and make some coffee. It's going to be a long night.

I turn off the living room light as I take my coffee- filled cup to the couch. After I sit, I realize the only light is the streetlamp outside my window, and it's shining on the folder the guy named Manny left. I think back. Could there have been anyone watching me? I think over the last three people I've killed. I'm tired, and my ass cheeks still sting as if I had a belt strap against them.

Once I finish two cups of coffee, I take a seat at my desk. I turn on the light, and I go through the photographs and the brief description of where I'm to go and what I'm to do. I close the folder. As I do, the envelope Manny left behind falls to the floor. As I reach down to pick it up, my chair makes the most awful squeal. I hear banging on the floor. A man yelling, "KEEP IT DOWN UP THERE." His yelling at my wheels going against the

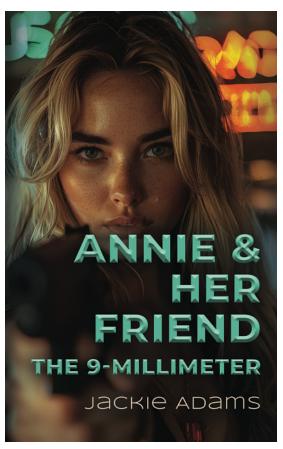
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floor is nothing new. He can hear that, but he can't hear the man that blindfolded and gagged me?

I pick the over-sized envelope up, opening it, realizing it's full of hundred-dollar bills. I stuff it back in. I take another drink of my coffee and peek back in the folder. Why is it so important that this Sanchez man should be dead? I open my laptop and do some research on Carlos Sanchez.

I slam the laptop shut not liking what I'm seeing. Sanchez is in Southern Missouri. Not only Southern Missouri, but he's located in the small town where I was born. The same small judgy town I left behind all those years ago. My parents' property is there. The land, over 70 acres, is still mine. My parents left it to me. It sits there. Sometimes haunting my dreams, calling for me. I haven't been home since graduating from high school at eighteen. It was a long two years, but I overcame it. Just like I will this.

I pour the rest of the coffee down the drain and make my way to the bed. I'm too tired to think this through tonight. Caffeine doesn't keep me awake like it used too. I curl up in my covers, close my eyes, and toss and turn through the rest of the wee hours.



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