



**A P R I L   H E N R Y**

RUN, HIDE,

FIGHT

BACK

*Christy Ottaviano Books*

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Within moments of Saturday's shooting at the Melbourne Square mall, dozens of officers from surrounding agencies pulled into the parking lot, helping shoppers and locking down the commercial structure while specially trained SWAT team members prepared to do a search inside. . . .

Brevard Sheriff Wayne Ivey said that training and experience from other agencies shows that in such cases, citizens who find themselves confined in a building or an area with a shooter, like the dozens of shoppers and workers in the mall when the shooting happened, often have three options.

"They can run, hide or fight," said Ivey.

—*Florida Today*, January 18, 2015

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Even if the attacker has a gun and you do not have a weapon, the situation is not hopeless. There have been many active shooter incidents where people on the scene were able to subdue the attacker and save their own lives. We teach civilians to swarm the shooter and use other tactics, such as positioning themselves near the door but out of sight, so they can try to take the gun away from the shooter as soon as he enters.

The effectiveness of these principles was demonstrated in our analysis of the Virginia Tech active



shooter event of 2007. In that incident, the shooter attacked or attempted to attack five classrooms. The people in each classroom responded in different ways. In the room that was attacked first and where no defensive actions were taken, 92 percent of the people were shot. In another room, where students had time to push a large desk against the door and hold it there, the shooter fired through the door, but no one was shot.

—Professor Pete Blair, Texas State University, from  
*The Police Response to Active Shooter Incidents*,  
published by the Police Executive Research  
Forum, March 2014

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If your enemy is secure at all points, be prepared for him. If he is in superior strength, evade him. If your opponent is temperamental, seek to irritate him. Pretend to be weak, that he may grow arrogant. If he is taking his ease, give him no rest. If his forces are united, separate them. Attack him where he is unprepared, appear where you are not expected.

—Sun Tzu (fifth century B.C. Chinese general, military strategist, and philosopher), *The Art of War*





# SURVIVE

WHEN THE SHOOTING BEGINS,  
among the dozens of people near Fairgate Mall's food  
court are six teenagers: Miranda Nash, Cole Bond, Javier  
Ramirez, Parker Gray, Amina Abdi, and Grace Busby.

The only thing they have in common is that they all  
want to live. But not all of them will survive.

# ONE HUNDRED MILES

3:37 P.M.

ONE HUNDRED MILES FROM PORTLAND'S Fairview Mall, a tractor-trailer is traveling west on Interstate 84. The eighteen-wheeler is plain, white, and unmarked. Anonymous.

It's safer that way. Safer for the three armed guards sitting on the truck's bench seat. Safer for the trailer's contents, which are rows of black buckets, filled with metal bars. Each metal bar is about the size of an ice-cube tray.

Some of the buckets hold silver bars. And some hold gold.

A single bucket of gold weighs eighty-six pounds and is worth \$1.6 million.

Karl McKinley has been thinking about those buckets for years.

Once a month, this tractor-trailer makes the trip from Martin's Metals in Boise, Idaho, to a processing plant in Vancouver, Washington. The plant serves jewelry makers from Portland to Seattle.

A few days before it left, Karl paid a worker at Martin's

Metals to add a couple of extra features to the eighteen-wheeler. Features the guards know nothing about.

The first is a GPS tracker stuck to the underside of the chassis with a magnet. The tracker means that Karl can follow the tractor-trailer virtually, without arousing the suspicion of the guards.

The second addition has been placed under the dash, in the footwell. It's a device normally used to deter burglars in million-dollar homes. When triggered by remote control, it will fill the truck's cab with pepper spray.



# SO MANY AND SO FAST

3:37 P.M.

“**T**HERE!” THE CLINIQUE SALESWOMAN smiles at Miranda Nash as she turns the mirror toward her. “Those colors really make your eyes pop. It’s a perfect look for holiday parties.”

Miranda’s eyelids are covered with silver shadow, thickly edged with forest-green liner. She looks like an alien. A beautiful, big-eyed alien, but still.

“You don’t think it’s too much?” Ignoring the pulsing pain in her temples, Miranda tilts her head. In the mirror, the pale girl with the dark hair and eyes does the same.

“It’s a statement look, but it suits you.”

The saleswoman reminds Miranda of her mom. Older, but still pretty, and holding on to her prettiness with both hands, fingernails dug in. The saleswoman had sized her up when she approached the counter. Miranda watched the other woman’s eyes go from Miranda’s expensive shoes to the logo on her designer purse. She’s probably hoping to sell her the primer, shadow, liner, and mascara, and some skin-care products.

“Can I see that foundation?” Miranda has been watching where everything came from, and she picks the item that is located farthest away. The one that will make the saleswoman turn her back.

The drawer next to Miranda’s knee holds slender boxes of mascara. As soon as the saleswoman turns away, she leans down and opens it, ignoring how the action makes her head ache even more. She reaches in, grabs a half-dozen tubes, and slips them into the Ace bandage around her waist. It’s covered by her oversize red sweater, the one designed to slide off one shoulder. The whole thing takes five seconds.

Miranda’s made a mental map of where most of the security cameras are in this mall. The nearest one sees only her back. She’s been careful not to turn her face toward it. With luck, they won’t even notice that anything has been stolen until they take inventory. She knows not to leave empty packages behind. Better to take the whole thing and leave them wondering, than leave an empty box and no doubt.

To throw the saleswoman off the scent, Miranda spends an extra five minutes pretending to weigh the pros and cons of the various products. “I’m going to have to think about it,” she finally tells the saleswoman. “I want to see how it looks by the end of the night.”

A flash of irritation is quickly masked by a professional smile that doesn’t quite reach the saleswoman’s eyes. “Of course.”

She’s probably thinking that Miranda just wanted a free makeover so she could attend some party. And that

if she even comes back to buy anything, all the products will be credited to some other salesclerk. That she has just wasted a half hour.

Guilt pinches Miranda. But she has to do this. She has to.

Because she's sick and getting sicker.

And it's still an hour until she is supposed to meet Matthew. How can she take the edge off? Maybe coffee will help. Down the mall's main hall is a Perk Me Up.

"I'll have a sixteen-ounce latte," she says to the barista. "With two extra shots."

The woman makes a face. "That's a total of four shots."

She should try living in Miranda's head. Someone's in there with a hammer. "Yeah, I know. But that's what I want."

As the woman fires up the espresso machine, which is decorated with tinsel and fake holly, Miranda leans against a pillar. Fifty feet away, she recognizes Parker's bright blond curls. Her stomach does a twist. After what happened a few weeks ago, she doesn't want to have to talk to him. To see the look in his eyes. Luckily, he has his back to her. He's with a couple of other guys from the wrestling team. They're getting up from a table, making no attempt to clean the mess of half-eaten food they're leaving behind.

Theatrically, Parker raises a napkin over his head, gives it a little shake, and then lets it fall to the floor. His audience is not only his buddies but a brown-skinned guy in a green apron. Parker's friends laugh. The busboy just looks down at the floor and grips his cart. Miranda sees



his jaw clench. In case Parker turns around, she moves to the other side of the pillar and leans against it, ignoring how the Ace bandage digs into her waist.

The move puts her closer to the bell ringer from Salvation Army, who is standing next to a red kettle bearing a slogan that reads like a bumper sticker: TOGETHER, WE CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE. The old woman would certainly make a difference if she would just stop her incessant *ding, ding, dinging*. The noise pings around inside Miranda's aching head.

At a table about twenty feet away, a mother and daughter are both eating apples. It's weird to see such healthy food when everyone around them is consuming stuff that's deep fried, covered with melted cheese, or both.

The two look like twins separated by twenty-five years: both with dark eyes and long brown hair parted in the middle. The girl's hair is held back with a white headband, while her mother's hangs loose. They're even dressed alike, in jeans and button-down shirts. Miranda squints. The girl's right hip has a long pale logo below the waistband as well as an embroidered white tab on the back pocket. Even though she's too far away to read the logo, Miranda knows what it says: Stella McCartney. If you're going to pay five hundred dollars for a pair of jeans, you want to make sure everyone knows it.

They lean toward each other, both of them smiling, trading words back and forth, gesturing with their long-fingered hands. What would it be like to be that close to your mom, Miranda wonders. And would she like it?

Since they're dressed so similarly, she wonders if they wear each other's clothes, and if so, how the girl feels about that. At home, Miranda has learned to hide anything she really likes, which annoys her mom. Not that you can tell by her expression. She's had so much Botox that her face can't get angry anymore. She can barely raise her eyebrows. Her happiest moments are when a stranger asks if she's Miranda's sister.

The rich girl's mom is lifting her apple for another bite when a bright-red splotch about the size of a fist appears on her chest.

Miranda blinks. The red spot is growing, like a magic trick she doesn't understand. Then she registers the sounds, nearly lost in the white noise of Christmas music and a hundred conversations.

*POP, POP, POP.*

A man in a blue plaid shirt two tables over clutches his arm. A skinny old woman falls, her walker and her Jamba Juice cup flying out in front of her.

The sounds are gunshots. So many and so fast, she can't count them.

Miranda looks back at the girl's mom. She's tilting. Her eyes are wide and blood is bubbling between her lips. And Miranda realizes that's what's on the woman's chest.

Blood.

# START TO DIE

3:52 P.M.

WHEN THE BOY WITH THE MOP OF blond curls made a show of dropping his napkin to the floor, Javier Ramirez kept his face impassive. The kid clearly thought he was a real badass.

Like a piece of garbage and maybe a muttered slur were going to ruin Javier's day.

Like he doesn't have real things to worry him.

What if, despite how hard he worked this term, his grades are bad? What if the mall figures out the Social Security number he gave them is fake? What if, after Christmas, they cut his hours?

Javier is bending over to pick up the napkin when the first shot comes from behind him. Behind and above. It catches a forty-ish woman in the chest.

He recognizes the sound immediately.

Javier is already running as more people in the food court start to die.



# FISH IN A BARREL

3:53 P.M.

THE SHOTS CONTINUE.

Miranda's mind is filled with a jumble of panicked thoughts. Her body is frozen as she tries to take it all in. People falling. Some are hurt. Some dead. Dozens running. Tripping over chairs in panic. Screaming. Shouting. Stampeded away as quickly as they can.

The rich girl pushes back her chair so fast, it falls over. She runs around the table to her mom, tries to catch her as she slides off her seat. The older woman's chest is now covered with blood, red and shiny as freshly spilled paint.

Is she dead? Miranda can't believe it, despite how boneless the woman now looks.

The barista drops her paper cup—just lets it splash on the floor—and flees into the back of the coffee shop. Where's Miranda supposed to go? What's she supposed to do?

Is she going to get shot? Is she going to die?

She tries to climb over the high counter. But the front

is a rounded glass display case for pastries and cookies. Her feet can't find purchase. She slides back down to the floor.

*POP, POP, POP.*

A bullet shatters the glass of the display case next to her chest.

Before the next one finds her, Miranda darts away.

She and the other people in the food court are fish in a barrel, the way her dad likes to say, to note how easy something is. *Like shooting fish in a barrel.*

Miranda feels for those poor fish now, swimming in frantic circles with no way to escape.

# BECAUSE OF THE BLOOD

3:54 P.M.

**G**RACE BUSBY TRIES TO LIFT HER MOM, but it's like trying to pick up a rag doll that weighs a hundred and thirty pounds. Grabbing her mom's wrists instead, Grace starts to drag her away. She curls her shoulders and tucks her head, hoping to provide less of a target.

She won't think about how pulling her mom over the linoleum is easier than it should be. Because of the blood.

Lately, Grace has seen a lot of blood. Most of it her own, filling up test tube after test tube. The doctors made a hole in her chest, about where her mom's is, only Grace's has a plastic cap over it.

A guy in a green apron runs up to her. His name tag reads JAVIER. "You have to leave her." He pulls at one of Grace's arms. "She's dead."

"But she's my mom." The woman Grace is dragging doesn't look like her mom, though. Not with her hair dyed dark, and her skin so pale. Her eyes and her mouth are both half-open. Neither of them moving.

"You can't help her."



“I can’t leave her.” Past Javier’s shoulder, she sees a middle-aged guy in a business suit fall to his knees. He’s clutching his neck with both hands, but red pulses out between his fingers.

“Your mother would not want you to die.” He grabs Grace’s wrist. “Now come!”

She stumbles after him.

# CAN'T BE REAL

3:55 P.M.

AS SHE RUNS FROM THE COFFEE SHOP, Miranda tilts her head back. The shots are coming from the second floor of the mall, which is open in the middle. There are no stores up there, just office space, the two floors linked by escalators. Three men in black ski masks are leaning over the railing and shooting long black guns, like AKs or something.

An older man shoves his wife behind him and then catches a bullet in the chest. Miranda lets out a scream as he falls to the floor. This can't be real.

But she knows it is. And the next person shot could easily be her. She has to get out of here. Now.

In the last few months, Miranda has come to know this mall better than most of the people who work here. In addition to knowing the location of every camera, she also knows every exit. Now she ducks underneath an escalator and runs toward the hall that leads outside.

# WAITING TO DIE

3:55 P.M.

A MINA ABDI WAS SPACING THE HANGERS one inch apart when she spotted it. A discarded Perk Me Up cup. Because the store sat near the food court, people seem to think they could wander in with a drink, or sometimes even food. Pinching the cup between her fingernails, she carried it to the trash. She ignored the looks Hannah and Giselle shared. Instead of working, they were leaning against the counter, gossiping.

On Amina's shifts, she never stops moving. There's always something to do, if you look. She makes sure that everything's in place, appearing exactly as it should. On the days she's scheduled, you'll never find an XS shoved in among the size Ls. She's determined to show Culpeppers that she's just as good as any other employee—if not better—even if her bosses seem uncomfortable with her hijab. That even though the manager has hinted about Culpeppers's "all-American vibe," Americans can be all kinds of things. Including Muslim.

Now there's some kind of disturbance out in the mall.

Moving to the entrance, Amina tries to make sense of it. A fire alarm starts to blare. In the food court, people are screaming, stampeding in all directions. Some lie crumpled on the floor. As she watches, an old woman topples off an escalator. Just lands on the floor and lies there, unmoving. And that sound, which she knows only from movies and cop shows—are those gunshots?

Hannah and Giselle push past Amina and start running. Careening through the food court. Then a bullet hits Hannah in the back and sends her sprawling. Amina screams, without meaning to. Giselle takes one look behind her and then sprints faster.

When the mall isn't open, Culpeppers closes with a metal roll-down security shutter. If Amina pulls it down, will it stop bullets?

She doesn't know, but it's better than nothing. It's better than standing here, waiting to die.

# PANIC

3:57 P.M.

THE FIRE ALARM STARTS SHRILLING OVER-head as Miranda runs past the Shoe Mill. The sound partially masks the screams behind her.

Laden with bags, shoppers are coming out of the stores. Most of them don't seem to be in any hurry. They're acting like it's a drill, like it won't make any difference if they ignore it. Then a man in a tan sweater barrels into the hall. His face is pale, his mouth and eyes wide. His fingers are clamped around his biceps, where the fabric is soaked with blood.

People look in the direction he came from, toward the food court. Miranda risks a glance over her shoulder. It's rapidly emptying out. In the middle of all the tables and chairs, a woman wearing a red scarf jumps out from behind the busboy's cart, where she had been hiding. Screaming, she runs toward the corridor where Miranda and the others are.

She doesn't make it.

The shoppers around Miranda begin to panic. They scream, swear, drop their packages, call out each other's names and to God.

And as Miranda pushes past them, they surge toward the exit doors.



# NONE OF THEM

3:57 P.M.

EIGHT MINUTES AGO, PARKER GRAY AGREED to let his little sister, Moxie, buy a pretzel by herself. He'd given her a five-dollar bill, pointed her in the direction of Auntie Anne's. She liked talking to people, and people liked talking to her. Seven years old, curly blond hair, and big blue eyes. Cute as a bug, everyone said.

Cute to everyone but Parker. She was more a weight around his neck. Today was teacher in-service training, which meant a day off from school. He should have been having fun. Instead he was a free babysitter, since his parents were both at work. But it wasn't like he was going to sit at home watching episodes of *Dora the Explorer*. He could at least hang out with his friends while Moxie alternately played with his phone or stuffed her round little cheeks with treats.

Now his friends have already sprinted away. Everyone who can still run is running. Parker stands in the middle of the food court, spinning. Screaming over the shrill of the fire alarm. "Moxie! Moxie! Moxie!" Not seeing her

anywhere. Auntie Anne's is deserted. His mind plays a panicked loop. Is she hurt? Is his sister dead?

A bullet zips past his ear and buries itself into a pillar. The space has emptied out. Chairs overturned. Drinks puddled on the floor. Blood puddled on the floor. And people slumped in such awkward sprawls that he knows they must be dead.

But none of them is a little girl in a red coat.

# TRAPPED

3:58 P.M.

MIRANDA PUSHES THROUGH THE CROWD toward the exit doors.

She's only a dozen feet away. But something is stretched across the exits. Cable bike locks, black rubber-coated braided steel, now link together the silver handles of each pair of doors. She pushes on the nearest door anyway. It opens an inch before the cable catches it.

Through the door glass, she sees people running across the parking lot into the gathering dusk.

Miranda's trapped. She and all the people behind her. There're only two ways out of this hall. One is through the locked doors. The other is through the food court, where the shooting started. Where the few remaining people are frantically trying to leave before they die.

And any minute, one of those men will come running down the escalator and finish what they started.

# VIDEO GAME

3:58 P.M.

IT'S LIKE A VIDEO GAME. THAT'S WHAT COLE Bond tells himself as he runs along the edge of the food court, sheltered by the overhang, past the bodies that lie crumpled on the linoleum floor.

That lady in the blouse who got shot first, she wasn't real. None of this is real. It's just an excellent animation. Maybe on one of these 3-D TV sets they have now. If he wanted, he could press the pause button. And if he turned around, his own couch would be at his back. He could get up and go to the fridge in the garage and get another beer.

He tries to tell himself that these bodies never existed outside the game. They never had real lives that got cut short. The coppery smell hanging in the air, that's just his imagination.

When Cole's feet slip in blood, it becomes harder to deny reality.

But he has to. Because if he acknowledges that all this is here and now and real, if he acknowledges what just

happened with his two older brothers, then something inside Cole will break.

Ahead of him, a girl in one of those Muslim headscarves is trying to pull down Culpeppers's metal security shutter. It's not much, but it's better than nothing.

Cole can't do anything for the lifeless bodies on the floor, but maybe he can stop this surreal horror from happening to more people.

# LIKE HER LIFE DEPENDS ON IT

3:59 P.M.

MIRANDA HAS TO GET OUT OF HERE. TO get to any of the other exits, she is going to have to cut back through the food court. But there're fewer and fewer people left alive out there, and those few are even more obvious targets. She ventures back to where the hall meets the food court. In front of LA Nails, sheltered by the overhang, she tries to figure out what to do. How to stay alive.

She spots Parker underneath one of the escalators. He's screaming his little sister's name as he frantically scans the area.

The busboy Parker was taunting is dragging the rich girl whose mother was shot across the open space. They are almost clear when there's another *POP, POP, POP*. He grabs his thigh and keeps lurching forward.

A whistle carries even over the fire alarm. Miranda looks for its source. A tall, thin guy standing just inside Culpeppers pulls his fingers from between his lips. On the other side of the entrance is that dark-skinned clerk,



the one who wears a headscarf. She beckons Miranda with an urgent hand. With the other, she's pulling down the roll-down metal security shutter.

Miranda runs toward the closing shutter like her life depends on it.

Knowing that it does.

**4:00 p.m.**

**DISPATCH:** Police, fire, or medical?

**RON SKINNER:** Police! We've got people being shot here!

**DISPATCH:** Okay. Tell me who you are and your address.

**SKINNER:** Ron Skinner. I work security at Fairgate Mall. And there's people being shot here!

**DISPATCH:** Okay, Ron, take a deep breath. Is there still active shooting?

**SKINNER:** I don't know! Hurry. Please hurry. They shot Gabriel and Zach. They work here too. I'm not sure where Timmy is. All we're issued is pepper spray and zip ties. And they've got assault rifles!

**DISPATCH:** I'm dispatching cars now. How many shooters are there? What's their location? Another caller stated that they were in the food court.

**SKINNER:** There's a lot of them. I'm trying to check all the cams. They started in the food court, but now they're all over. If they figure out I'm up here in the security office, they'll kill me, too. You've got to get your people here now! Please, please. I don't want to die!

## BEFORE HE SEES US

4:00 P.M.

MIRANDA'S NOT THE ONLY ONE DESPER-  
ately making for Culpeppers. Ahead of her, the  
rich girl and the injured busboy are also heading for  
the store and the slowly lowering metal security shutter.  
The top of one of his pant legs is already dark and shiny  
with blood. His arm is looped over the girl's shoulders.  
As thin as she is, she is somehow half carrying him.

How close are the men with guns? Miranda looks back  
over her shoulder. Parker's in the same spot underneath  
the escalator, spinning in frantic circles with his hands  
outstretched. He's stopped yelling "Moxie!" but it's clear  
he's still looking for his little sister. If Miranda didn't  
already know it was Parker, if she hadn't seen him just fif-  
teen minutes ago, she would not recognize him now. His  
mouth is wide and turned down at the corners, his face  
streaked with tears.

When her eyes focus past Parker, Miranda freezes. On  
the far side of the food court, one of the killers is coming  
down the escalator. Instead of running down the steps, he

stays on his stair as it descends, as calm as a casual shopper. A casual shopper with an automatic rifle in his hands. He's dressed all in black, including a black ski mask with holes for his eyes and mouth. He's like a bug or a monster. Or a terrorist.

Is that what they are? Terrorists?

Over his clothes, he wears something like a short black apron with narrow, deep pockets holding red rubbery bricks with wires coming out of them. After a beat, Miranda's brain supplies the term. It's a suicide vest.

The escalator is otherwise empty, but at the bottom there's a pile of three or four bodies. One of them, a woman with curly black hair, is still moving. Her legs churn weakly against the red-streaked linoleum.

Without any hurry, the man raises his rifle and fires. Her limbs jerk and then stop.

The shot breaks the spell that has held Miranda. She has to get out of here! The killer's gaze is still focused in front of him. He isn't looking her way. Not yet. But in a minute he'll turn. He will turn his head and he will see her and he will kill her.

She's just ten feet from Culpeppers. Ten feet from the metal shutter that might save her. The shutter that is already down to chest level as the busboy and the rich girl duck underneath it.

Still, Miranda turns back, ignoring the voice in her head screaming she's a fool. She sprints toward Parker and yanks his wrist, spinning him toward her. "Come on!" she says, her voice an urgent whisper that barely

competes with the shrill ringing of the fire alarm. “Before he sees us.”

He resists, but she tugs harder, her eyes on the gunman, who is stepping off the escalator.

Instead of following her, Parker gasps. Not in horror, but in something closer to joy. He’s spotted something in the hall with the locked doors that Miranda just abandoned. He tears his wrist from her grasp and races away.

Miranda turns back toward Culpeppers. The metal roll-down shutter is almost to the floor now. All she can see are knees and feet. And one head and a beckoning arm. It’s the guy who whistled, his face contorted. He’s not making any sound, but Miranda can read his lips.

He’s mouthing “Hurry!”

A foot from the rattling shutter, Miranda throws herself on her belly and rolls underneath.

Just before it closes.

**4:01 p.m.**

**DISPATCH:** All units, be advised, reports of active shooters inside Fairgate Mall. Possibly at the food court. 68 and 53, respond.

**UNIT 68:** 68 copy.

**UNIT 53:** 53 copy.

**DISPATCH:** One reporting party is a security officer on-site with access to cams. I've got ambulances en route.

**UNIT 68:** Confirm shooters still on scene?

**DISPATCH:** Affirm. First RP reports they're still inside, multiple shots fired. Second report, from the security guard, is at least eight, probably male, unknown race, black clothing, possible AR-15s.

**UNIT 53:** What about the other security guards?

**DISPATCH:** RP says they're down.

**UNIT 68:** Notify SWAT for call out.

**DISPATCH:** Affirm. SWAT's been notified.

**UNIT 68:** 68 on scene.

**DISPATCH:** Copy.

**UNIT 53:** 53 about two blocks away.

**UNIT 68:** I'm at the south side, 53. Dispatch, we're gonna need more units. There's at least five exits on this side, and there's people pouring out of them. But I'm not hearing any gunshots.

**DISPATCH:** Copy. All available units, respond to the Fairgate Mall.

**UNIT 43:** 43 on my way.

**UNIT 41:** 41 about ten minutes out.

**UNIT 68:** [shouting in the background] I've got at least three who've been shot, but there're hundreds of people just running around. We need more cars. We need to set up a perimeter.

**DISPATCH:** Copy. I have 43 and 41 and who else?

**UNIT 45:** 45 just entering the property.

**UNIT 14:** Unit 14 en route from the substation.

**UNIT 77:** 77 on the way, but traffic's congested on 26.

**UNIT 115:** 115 is on I-5, but it's backed up as well.

**DISPATCH:** Any plainclothes responding, make sure you have your raid gear on.

**UNIT 53:** [moans in the background] This is 53. I've got at least five more injured in the parking lot. One male with chest wound appears critical.

**DISPATCH:** Copy. Fire is responding.



**UNIT 68:** Call Tigard, Beaverton, Oregon City, Salem, Vancouver, and anyone else for additional support. We're going to need everyone we can get.

**DISPATCH:** Copy.

**UNIT 45:** I got another person outside shot, a female in the leg. We need rescue hot.

**DISPATCH:** 45, your location?

**UNIT 45:** East side of the mall on foot.

**DISPATCH:** Copy, 45. We'll alert rescue.

**UNIT 14:** [sirens in the background] 14 on-site, west side. No gunshots heard.

**DISPATCH:** Confirm, no gunshots heard?

**UNIT 14:** Affirm. Not since my arrival.

**UNIT 68:** 68. The shooting appears to have stopped. I'll assume command. Have fire stage in that old Sports Authority lot. It's freestanding, on north side of mall. I want at least eight units establishing a perimeter and controlling traffic. For now, command is in front of Nordstrom on south side. Nordstrom opens directly into the food court.

**DISPATCH:** Copy.

# IT'S YOUR LUCKY DAY

4:02 P.M.

WHEN MIRANDA YANKS AT PARKER'S wrist, he doesn't have time to wonder why she's in Fairgate Mall or why she, of all people, is trying to save his life. Because Parker catches a glimpse of a small figure dressed in red.

*Moxie!*

Shaking off Miranda's grip, he takes off after his sister. Sticking to the perimeter, sheltered by the overhang of the second floor, he sprints flat out.

Parker darts into the corridor where he just saw the flash of red. Even though he's lost sight of her, Moxie has to be here, because there's no way out. Ahead of him, the exit doors are chained shut. Behind him is the food court, where the only people left are dead or dying, and at least one of the killers is on the hunt. Moxie must be among the couple of dozen people frantically milling around, or maybe in one of the small stores that lie on either side. With a wrestler's agility, Parker cuts through the crowd, squeezing between a woman wearing a white visor and

apron and a middle-aged guy dressed head to toe in Blazers gear. Parker zigzags between a kid he vaguely recognizes from school and a girl who looks like a teenager but has a baby in a stroller. Past an old guy in high-waisted jeans and white puffy tennis shoes, a young woman in impossibly high heels, three college girls clutching shopping bags and one another. Santa is here too, or at least the guy who was posing for photos a few minutes ago. Now he sits on a bench, his face red and sweaty. Parker dodges and weaves and slips, his gaze bouncing from one person to another: from an older black lady to a forty-ish businessman to a guy with a bushy beard and gauges. To a man with a shaved head hiding behind a pillar, a gun in his hand. To a middle-aged guy holding his arm like a tourniquet, blood welling between his fingers.

But no Moxie.

She must be in one of the stores. On one side is a Shoe Mill, and an AT&T phone store. On the other is a Coach store, a Van Duyn, and something called Eternity Day Spa. They are all small enough that the only way in or out is through each store's entrance from inside the mall. Moxie must be hiding in one of them, either in fear or blissful ignorance. Waiting desperately—or maybe just with an impatient giggle—for Parker to find her. He hopes it's the second one. Hopes that she has no idea what's going on. Hopes that he can snatch her up, keep her from seeing the dead, and find a way out.

The fire alarm suddenly stops. For a second, the silence is as loud as the piercing shrill had been. Then it's filled by the sounds of people crying and freaking out and

yelling into their cell phones and asking each other what to do.

Parker is about to dart into the nearest store, the Shoe Mill, when a metallic clatter makes him turn. It's one of the ski-masked killers. He's pulling a seven-foot-tall folding metal security gate across the end of the corridor, right where it opens out into the food court. His AK is slung on his back. One side of the gate is bolted to the wall. It rattles along on casters, opening like an accordion. As soon as the guy reaches the other side, they will be penned in like animals. Animals at a slaughterhouse.

The crowd's panic ratchets up even higher. The guy with the gauges starts to run toward the rapidly closing opening. But on the other side are two more guys wearing ski masks, both of them shouting, "Stay back!" and pointing their rifles at him and the people behind him.

Parker imagines bullets mowing half a dozen people down. But then the guy's shoulders slump and he steps back.

Just before the security gate is all the way across, the killer who was pulling it steps inside. His lips are as full as a girl's. In his head, Parker christens him Lips. Lips swings his rifle in a half circle so that they all step back.

All three killers are wearing suicide vests. One of the two men on the other side of the gate locks it with a padlock. He has a dark mole just underneath his left eyebrow. Mole points the rifle at the people they have penned in. The third killer puts a megaphone to his mouth. His eyes are the silvery blue of a wolf's.

"Listen up, everyone," Wolf says. "If you want to

live—and I’m supposing you do—you have to be quiet and you have to do what we say.” His tone is matter-of-fact. “Because if you disobey us, you will be killed. To begin with, anyone who is still on their phone, turn it off. Now!”

Parker thinks to look for the man with the shaved head and the handgun, the one who was hiding behind a pillar, but he’s disappeared. If that guy shoots one of the killers, will that trigger the explosives?

“What do you want from us?” asks a black woman with silvered dreads.

Wolf says, “First of all, none of you should be talking. And certainly not talking back.” He points his rifle at her and she flinches. “I could shoot you to make my point. But I won’t. Not this time. But the next person who talks, I will put you down like the dogs you are.”

The only sound is the *drip-drip-drip* of blood hitting the floor from the wounded man’s arm.

“As for what we want—we want the world to listen. You’re here to make sure that people pay attention. And we don’t need any competing messages. Which means all of you have to give me your phones. Every single one. Take them out of your pockets and purses and slide them across the floor to me. Because if we catch one of you with a phone, you’ll die.” Casually, he points his rifle at the group, aiming it at one person, then another. For a heart-freezing instant, it’s aimed at Parker’s head, but then it moves on.

One by one, people bend down and send their phones sliding along the floor until they clear the four-inch gap at the bottom of the gate. If the phones don’t quite make

it, people close to the gate kick them the rest of the way. Mole starts tossing the phones into an empty Macy's bag.

"November, report in," Wolf says into his mic. "November. Over."

As Wolf waits for an answer that doesn't come, Parker's fingers touch the edge of his phone, which is in his back pocket. Parker's blocked from view by a plump middle-aged woman in front of him. Instead of pulling out his phone, he slips his finger to the side and toggles it into the silent position.

After Mole is done, Wolf nods at Lips, who goes to the door of the Shoe Mill. "Anyone hiding has to come out now!" Lips yells. "If we find you later, we'll kill you."

He repeats himself at every store. A guy in his twenties wearing khakis, a pressed blue shirt, and a name tag appears in the doorway of the phone store. A sixty-ish woman in a white hairnet comes out of Van Duyn, anxiously twisting her hands. Both are made to surrender their phones. The AT&T guy has three.

But Moxie doesn't appear. Where is she? Parker never prays, but now he prays that she has somehow run very far away. That she has found an exit and is now being evacuated by the police. Because the alternative is too awful to contemplate.

Wolf comes back to the metal security gate. His posture is relaxed, his voice unhurried. "People, you may not know this, but you are at war. And like all wars, civilians sometimes get caught in the cross fire." The smile visible through the mouth hole of his ski mask does not match

the cold gaze coming through the eye holes. “Sorry about that.”

Everyone is silent, watching Wolf alertly. “If there is a hell, then we’ll be in good company with a lot of fighter pilots who also had to bomb innocents to win the war. But you should know that you are serving a more noble purpose than simply being victims.” His gaze takes them all in. “You are the key to changing everything.”

Wolf points through the security gate at the kid Parker recognized. His name is Joe or Joel—something like that—and he’s a year behind Parker at school. “You. In the glasses.” Joe/Joel’s black-framed glasses are sliding down his tearstained face. “Come here.”

The kid doesn’t move. Lips comes up behind him and pokes his back with the rifle.

With a whimper, the kid shuffles forward, a wet stain spreading over the crotch of his pants.

“It’s your lucky day, kid.” Wolf’s grin is humorless. “You’re going to live. We’re going to open this gate and let you out.” He reaches into his pocket and pulls out a fistful of flash drives. “You’re going to put these in your pockets, and then you’re going to run down to the end of that hall and cut through Sears and go outside with your hands in the air. You’re going to give these to any reporters you see. You’re the one who is going to get our message out.”



# JUST A SHELL

4:02 P.M.

**A**FTER MIRANDA ROLLS UNDER THE METAL pulldown shutter, it hits the floor with a bang. Her heart leaps in her chest like a dying fish flopping on a boat deck.

Pressing her lips together, she forces her lungs to still as she strains to hear if Parker will be shot. The bike-locked hall he ran to is just around the corner, about a hundred feet away.

She hears running footsteps and muffled shouts and screams, layered over the blare of the fire alarm, on the far side of the shutter. But no shots. What is she hearing? More victims? The bad guys? Maybe even the cops?

Finally Miranda lets herself breathe again, a series of hitching gasps. She pushes herself to a sitting position. Her body feels heavy and clumsy, a sack of flesh she can barely animate.

There are four other teens in the store. On her left is the dark-skinned girl in a turquoise headscarf, the one who just lowered the metal shutter. She works here, at

Culpeppers. Her name, Miranda remembers, is Amina. Her eyes are wide enough that they are rimmed with white. “This can’t be real,” Amina says, more to herself than anyone else. “This can’t be happening.”

On her right, the guy who urged Miranda under the shutter stands with his fists clenched. His dark hair falls over his eyes, and he holds his mouth so tightly that his lips have disappeared. He’s dressed in jeans and a plain black T-shirt.

The girl whose mom just died leans against the counter, head down, sobbing wordlessly, high-pitched *huh-huh-huhs*. Heard just by itself, Miranda thinks, it might almost sound like laughter.

The busboy sits on the floor, his back against the counter. His eyes are closed, his face taut with pain. He’s pressing his palms on the front and back of his thigh, over the places where the bullet came and went. Miranda squints to read the name tag on his green apron. JAVIER.

Javier opens his dark eyes and looks at her. Despite his efforts, blood is already puddling on the white linoleum.

“We should try to stop that bleeding,” Miranda says to no one and everyone. Grabbing two acid-yellow sweatshirts from a stack, she scuttles forward on hands and knees.

Javier shifts his hands so she can sandwich his leg between the two sweatshirts. Then she ties the arms of the bottom sweatshirt over the top one.

“Thank you.” His bloody fingers squeeze her palm. His eyes are so dark, they don’t seem to have pupils.

Amina is staring at Miranda. Her eyes narrow.

“Wait—it’s you!” Her tone is almost indignant. A month ago, Amina caught her walking out of the store with a foil-lined Culpeppers shopping bag filled with stolen cashmere sweaters. As a result, Miranda has been banned from the store.

People are out there dying, and this girl is still thinking about the rules. Miranda starts to laugh. She can’t help it. The sound flirts with hysteria. It’s too loud. What if someone out there, one of the men with guns, hears her over the fire alarm?

Putting her hand over her mouth, she tries to stifle herself. She can taste Javier’s blood, metallic and salty. She wants to throw up. She wants to scream, she wants to cry. She wants to be anyplace but here.

When Miranda finally speaks, she manages to keep her voice to a half whisper. “What are you going to do, make me go back out there again?”

“No,” Amina says. “Of course not.” She looks away, her mouth twisting.

Miranda looks away too. The rich girl is lost in her own world. She locks her fingers in her hair as she mutters, “Oh my God, Mom, please, no, no, no. Don’t be dead, Mom. You can’t be dead!”

The guy who urged Miranda to roll under the shutter steps closer. “Wait—was that *your* mom who got shot first?”

The wailing pauses, and the girl’s eyes flash to him. Her expression is a wordless answer.

“I am so sorry,” the guy says, wincing in sympathy. His eyes are light gray. “That’s awful.”

The girl chokes out, "But what if she's not dead? What if she's just hurt? I should go back out there."

"Look—" Javier begins, then interrupts himself. "What's your name?"

"Grace." Her eyes dart back and forth between him and the security shutter.

"Trust me, Grace. She's dead." His voice is as flat as his words, with only a trace of an accent. "Your mama is dead."

"How can you know that?"

"She's not the first person I've seen die." He closes his eyes again.

Miranda exchanges a curious glance with the other guy. What does this Javier person know, anyway? Then she realizes that she knows something too. She swallows and says, "I'm sorry to say this, but I think Javier's right. I saw one of them come down the escalator. He was killing anyone who was still alive."

"Even if my mom is dead, I can't just leave her out there." Grace's voice is high-pitched, distorted to a quaver. "That's my mom."

"But that's *not* your mom," the pale-eyed guy says in an urgent whisper. "Not anymore. That's just—just a shell." His mouth turns down hard on the corners. "And she would want you to live."

"Who are you and what would you know about what my mom would want?"

"I'm Cole. And that's what any parent would want for their child."

"Well, Cole, you don't know what my mom would

want. Maybe she wouldn't want to be alone. You guys don't know anything about her. Whether she's dead, what she would want . . ." Grace stands up and takes a step toward the shutter.

Miranda grabs her wrist. "If you go back out there, you'll put all of us at risk."

"But they've stopped shooting." Grace tries to pull free, but Miranda won't let her.

"They've stopped because anyone left out there is dead."

Suddenly the fire alarm cuts off.

Miranda holds up her free hand. "Shh!"

Everyone freezes. From outside, in the direction Parker ran to, comes a series of sounds. Rattling metal. Announcements made through what sounds like a megaphone. Miranda can make out some of the words. Something about the world listening. Something about giving up their phones. And then they all flinch at a sound. It's muffled, but it sounds like a shot.

"We have to get out of here," Miranda whispers. "If they figure out we're in here, they'll kill us."

Amina points. "The metal security shutter will protect us."

Javier opens his eyes. "That don't mean anything. I've seen bullets go right through car doors."

Miranda doesn't want to know how Javier knows these terrible things. She points toward the rear of the store. "Where does that door go to?"

"To the service corridor." Amina's face lights up. "Which eventually leads to an exit." She hurries over,

pushes it open, and sticks out her head. But before anyone can think about following her, she yanks it closed again. When she turns back, she's shaking so hard, her whole body trembles. "They're killing people out there, too. There's a body right there. I think it's Linda from Pottery Barn." She shakes her head in disbelief. "Linda!"

Everyone slumps as the strings of hope are cut. "Can *they* get in here from out there?" Miranda whispers.

Amina shakes her head. "Not unless they have a key for this store. And only employees have those."

So the five of them can't leave, but it's not safe to stay, either. According to Javier, bullets could stitch through the metal shutter like it was tin foil.

"Everyone, turn off the ringers on your phone." Cole slices his hand through the air. "We don't want them to hear us."

Miranda's phone is already on silent. Closing her eyes, she forces herself to stop picturing how they are going to die. Forces herself to think. Three months ago, her school did a lockdown drill. She remembers sitting in the far corner of a dark classroom while someone out in the hall rattled the locked door. It was like playing hide-and-seek, holding your breath in the gloom and trying not to giggle. Fun, not frightening. Sure, you knew bad things went down in other schools, other places. But stuff like that always happened to someone else. It would never happen to you.

What had the sheriff's deputy told them in that assembly? Now it comes back to her. To run if they could. To hide if they couldn't. To fight back if they must.

With killers at both store exits, running is out of the question. They're hiding now, but if Javier is right, sitting behind this metal roll-down shutter isn't offering them much protection.

A man's voice, just outside the shutter, makes her jump. Addressing himself to anyone hiding in the mall, he says that this is their one chance to leave. That he will let people go now and only now. And that if they stay and are found later, they will be killed. After a pause, he repeats himself, only he sounds farther away.

"Maybe we should open the shutter and go?" Grace whispers.

"No! We can't trust them." Cole's voice breaks. "They'll just kill us all."

"But if we stay here and Javier's right, that metal shutter isn't enough protection," Miranda says. "We need to get farther back from it." She points. "Where does that other door go to?" She thinks she knows, but she's not sure.

Amina follows her finger. "A storeroom."

"Let's go." Miranda gets to her feet and looks at Cole. "Help me get Javier back there."