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## The Gunman

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# The Gunman

*Angelyka Cava*

Knowing it will be my last day, I stroll into school thirty-seven minutes late with a smile on my face. I am not graduating, but I feel more accomplished than the people who will soon wear their raven-colored robes and matching tasseled hats, parading around the auditorium to receive their hard-earned diplomas along with a handshake from the principal. Today I have plans to do just what the administration is too chicken and lazy to do: hand out punishments that will actually make my schoolmates pay for their crimes.

My backpack is five pounds heavier than usual, causing my back to hunch over a bit. Normally, I can't afford to lose a couple of centimeters, but today it doesn't matter. Once I stand in front of them with my gun, I'll tower over everybody. I imagine the look on Jason's face. He's in the prime of his life right now, a popular high school senior. Basketball MVP with tons of worshippers and a smoking hot girlfriend. He doesn't want to die. I decide to shoot him in the legs first, making him think he has a chance of recovery, before I come back to his immobilized body and check his name off my list of targets.

*Sucker.*

Gently, I set my backpack on the floor and take a seat in the back row of Ms. Brown's pre-calculus class, in the middle of yet another one of her monotonous, never-ending lectures. She'll be the first one to go.

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Proofs are an unfortunate mix of boring and complicated, and topics like this make Clara wonder why she decided to become a math teacher in the first place. It really isn't worth it, especially when you're stuck at Wintergreen High School. The

district doesn't pay you nearly enough and the students don't give a shit.

Except one, Caleb Taylor, who aces every quiz and submits every homework assignment. Well, except for the one due last week. He never turned in his practice problems from the end of chapter 10. For some reason, Clara couldn't bring herself to mark it as a zero in the gradebook. It would taint his perfect grade. The funny thing was you wouldn't expect much from him. He always sat in the back of the class, jacket hood covering his earphones. Sometimes she could hear the striking thuds of heavy bass and speedy drumming whenever she paused her lesson to take a breath or clear her throat.

Clara's star pupil isn't paying attention. He never does. So why does she bother droning on?

There are only five minutes left. She begins discussing double identities, but watching paint dry would pass the time faster.

At least until she releases a shriek like an alarm, a high-pitched warning that causes everyone in the class to jump out of their seats.

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*What a dumbass.*

Because Ms. Brown captures all my attention, I let most of the class escape. But whatever, she was my number one target anyway. I hate everything about her, from her stupid Cheeto-colored hair to the "I Care About You" sticker plastered onto her desk. If that were so, she wouldn't have stood there like an idiot as she witnessed Jason jabbing his elbow into my side, creating an impact that slammed me against the wall a couple of days ago. She wouldn't have run off before he ripped my backpack from my weak clutch and emptied its contents all over the floor.

The blood seeping from her chest and dyeing her cream sweater crimson is a hypnotizing sight that I could stare at for

hours, but hearing the screams from the hallway reminds me to get going. My next target is in the classroom next door, and I have to catch her before she runs off to her boyfriend like she always does.

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Tilting her chin at an angle adjacent to her craned neck, Jessica stared at the Millennium Force. Over three hundred feet tall with uncovered carts traveling at almost a hundred miles an hour—there was no way in hell she would ride that damn contraption.

“Please baby, do it for me,” Jason whispered, folding his arms around his girlfriend. As usual, her shiny hair glistened underneath the sun and lent a fruity scent to the passing breeze.

“No way,” she replied, pushing him off her. He knew well that she was afraid of heights. She couldn’t even walk next to the railing on the second story of the mall.

“You’ll be fine, hon. Trust me,” he said, wrapping her dainty wrist with a gold charm bracelet the color of her hair, a gift enough to convince her to go on the ride, as if it physically made her braver. She should have known that the jewelry wouldn’t stop the ride itself from being way too fast, nor would it prevent her from barfing up her half-digested french fries right after, but that didn’t stop her from regarding it as a good-luck charm.

Whatever sort of bravery her bracelet gave her in the past is gone now. Over time, its embrace around her arm became cold and unfamiliar, distant like her boyfriend. He sure chose a great day to skip school. Underneath her desk, she can barely breathe. It feels as though any noise will call the terrorist to her location. There’s no way she’ll survive today. Every kid at school either envies or loathes her. Fog clouds her mind, preventing her from deciding how she wants to spend what might be her last moments on Earth. But trapped in a pitch-black classroom, she doesn’t have much to do but wait.

~ ~ ~

When you've memorized your targets' class schedules, all lockdowns do is make it easier for you to find them. As soon as I bust into Spanish II, I turn on the lights and start scanning the room for the curly golden hair that could only belong to Jessica.

I want to stare at the faces looking up at me that now know their lives are in my hands. Maybe I looked like that whenever Jason put his hands on me, ready to strike. It's interesting how simply holding a gun can change everything, giving me absolute power over the hundreds of people in this building. But I don't have much time; I still have two more targets.

"WHERE'S JESSICA?" I roar at a volume that I didn't think possible for me to generate. When I say those words I notice a faint cry toward the front of the classroom, and find my target's normally comely face distorted into a monstrous shape, tears streaming down her face. I can't believe this ugly, pathetic creature used to star in my dreams. *Let's see her turn me down now.*

~ ~ ~

Jessica never would have expected quiet little Caleb Taylor to be the sole person responsible for this lockdown. How could he do something like this? He was a nice kid, harmless even. Before today, the only offensive thing he ever did was remind their teachers of homework assignments. And why is he targeting her? She hasn't ever said two words to the guy.

"So, the winter dance is coming up. I recall mustering up the courage to ask you to this gathering last year, but you not-so-politely declined. You'd go out with any guy, and you weren't even dating Jason back then, so what didn't you like about me?"

*Ob.* So they had spoken before.

Caleb grips the trigger tighter. "One more chance. Would you like to go to the winter dance with me?"

*No way in hell.* A night out with a criminal seems like a fate even worse than death. Yet Jessica whispers, “Yes.” She’d say anything to get out of this position, cramped legs and a pounding heart to match her throbbing headache.

“How pathetic.” He squeezes the trigger.

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With her brain flowing in a sea of blood out of the newly-created hole in her head, Jessica looks better than ever. The serene expression on her face makes her look like she will awaken from a pleasant dream in a few hours. In stark contrast, the rest of the people in the room stare at me with eyes the size of car tires. They’re lucky I don’t want to shoot them. Too lucky.

But then I spot a pale-skinned girl with hair the shade of the starless night sky a couple of desks away from where Jessica lies, without any emotion on her face. I head for her next. “You’re not scared of me?”

She doesn’t say anything in response, and I search her face for the slightest hint of fear. No bulging eyes, no nostrils flaring, no downturned lips. Her lack of concern irritates me, and I point the gun a few feet away her head. “You’re completely fine if you die today?” I say to my new target, not giving her any time to respond before I send the bullet flying into her skull, blasting her blood all over the sides of the desk under which she sits.

As soon as I see her take her last breath, I rush to my next destination, where two of my targets should be.

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Three days ago, I began the list of people at my school who absolutely deserved to die during a very boring chemistry lesson. The only names that came to mind were Ms. Brown, Jason, and Jessica, but I nearly filled the entire sheet of torn-out college-ruled notebook paper trying to figure out the most efficient route to take out all three of them. Unfortunately, I

didn't think of the possibility of anyone seeing this scheme and left my work unblocked.

"What's that?" asked Andy, the guy forced to sit next to me. We exchanged homework answers sometimes, but other than that we never really talked.

I passed it over to him, and I don't think he took it seriously, adding the name "Kevin Kaiser." I didn't really know anything about Kevin except for the fact that he was a senior still stuck in a lot of sophomore-level classes. "I'll shoot him for you if you don't tell anyone about this," I said.

"Sure, whatever."

~~~

After a bit of research, I learned that Kevin is in the same first period class as Jason, world history, just a few doors down from Jessica's Spanish class. *This should be easy.*

Running down the hall I'm faster than I've ever been, not needing to avoid Jason's legs aiming to trip me. It only takes me about a minute to break into Room 208, where all its inhabitants are perched on the far side of the room opposite from the window, as if that would save them. Kevin is the second guy in line I see, and I aim for his chest. The mess spills onto the people on both his sides, but they're too scared to be disgusted.

I scan the classroom a few times, but Jason is nowhere to be found. I could recognize his signature scent of overbearing Axe cologne and ridiculously deep butt chin from a mile away, but neither are present in this room. Is he seriously absent on the day that karma is finally going to bite him in the ass?

There's no turning back now. I can't find where he lives and go to his house in this short amount of time, especially when the cops will be on my tail any minute. If I'm going out, I have to go out in a bang.

I cock the gun and prepare to wipe this entire room of any sign of life besides my own.

~ ~ ~

Whether your eyes are open or closed, it doesn't matter. The room is so dark that you can't tell the difference. With the warmth of the bodies of your peers nestled in the corner of the classroom as far from the portals separating you from the rest of the school as possible, you almost feel safe. Comfortable, even. But the announcement you heard a few minutes ago about an unexpected lockdown shortly after loud screams and the sound of a gunshot prevents you from feeling any sort of ease. Over time, the number of the gunshots increases, and you have an instinct that you're next.

Maybe you're praying. Maybe you're wondering if you were nice to your mom before you left for school today. Maybe you're imagining what it feels like to die. But it doesn't matter whatever you're thinking. When the large glass window shatters into hundreds of pieces and the light of the hallway enters, you know that you're seconds away from your imminent death.

The gunman is someone you've seen around school but never really paid much attention to. You try to memorize his face, but when the gun is in front of you that's the only thing you can see. Until everything goes black and all you can feel is a sharp blast of pain, then nothing at all.