

## Late for Work

It was the light blue eyes of the nine year old girl with the sandy red hair who first saw the two Arab men pull the black pistols from their Submarine Sandwich bags. The cold black of the guns was quite a contrast to the bright yellow bows that were in the little girl's hair.

"No one move! or you will all be killed!!" shouted the thin one. He had severe acne with a horrible beaked nose and bad teeth that showed the darkness around the roots. It was then that the gray haired man wearing the dark jacket who was sitting in the right corner of the bus reached under his left arm for his gun. Perhaps if his wind-breaker had not been zipped up so much he would have made it or perhaps if he had just been lucky. But he was not lucky. Professional bodyguards like him are still human like the rest of us and feel the cold. So like us they tend to zip their jacket up on a cold day. They let their defenses down. He was not lucky today and the fat terrorist with the jowls of fat under his jaw shot him. The sound echoed through the gondola which was on a path between 31st Street station and the United Nations building.

I don't know which one of them I disliked the most. I think it was the fat one. His coat had spread open and he was wearing a knit shirt that didn't fully cover his hairy belly. There was some type of a food stain on the front of the shirt.

There were six of us in the gondola: the two terrorists, myself, the little girl, her nanny, (a woman in her 60's with a kind look), the dead bodyguard, and there was one other person. I never knew her name. She was perhaps in her late 20's average height and a muscular build. She had the kind of figure that was pleasing to men. She was wearing white jeans with cowboy boots and a blue denim shirt that was looked soft to the touch. Her face was average except for

the lines that were chiseled at a forty five degree angle across her cheeks below gray eyes. It was her eyes that fascinated me then and haunt me now.

She had the hardest gaze in her eyes of anyone I've ever seen. A gaze that looks like something made of stone. It was like a dangerous animal at the zoo that has been beaten by its captor and stares back. Cold...., silent, without any emotion what so ever; devoid of human feeling. Inhuman would be the word. Incapable of human emotion.

By this time the terrorists were on their cellular phones alerting the media. They also called someone who was a part of their group on the outside. The young woman turned to us and said, "I'll be late for work." She said it without any emotion like the look in her eyes. without any emotion. She said it like someone might in a coffee shop if their eggs are taking too long, "I'll be late for work."

The rest of us trapped in the gondola were horrified at the events that had happened. The little girl was being held tightly by the nanny who obviously cared dearly for her. We were perhaps fifty yards feet away from the station suspended in mid-air over the New York City street below.

In broken English the terrorists were talking to the media on their phones, "This is a political act against the nation whose ambassador's daughter we now hold hostage. We are demanding the release of our brothers who are being held illegally." The more they talked the louder they got.

Time seemed to lose its proportion as the conversations continued. The young woman with the stone eyes was checking her watch and I could see her forming the words on her lips, ".. late for work." It seemed like such a ridiculous thing to say. All our lives were at risk. There

had already been a murder and a kidnapping and what she has to say is that she is late for work? It was an insane statement.

In perhaps twenty minutes the FBI had gotten involved. The terrorists wanted the release of people like themselves in another country, a plane to take them home, and a fortune in money wired to some place I had never heard of.

The fat one waddled across the ten feet or so of the gondola looking at the body of the young woman with the stone eyes. It was one of those looks that a man gives when he never really sees the woman's face ,only her body. He was almost dripping saliva as if he couldn't get enough gratification of everything from sex to food. He was fat and repulsive. But his lust didn't sway him from the larger task at hand. He jerked the little girl away from the nanny's embrace causing the nanny to scream. With one hand he held the little girl and with the other he slapped the nanny with the back of his hand sending her head reeling back against the Plexiglas window.

I was watching the young woman's stone cold eyes. There was nothing in them. They even held no fear. The thin one with the bad skin pulled a knife out of his pocket and told the FBI, "Watch this you lousy cop bastards! This is a sample of what we can send to her father if you want." With that he pulled the little girl's hair on one side of her head up and without any thought of how close he came to her skin he whacked part of her hair off. He went to the window and threw the child's hair out into the open air. It seemed to float as if it were from an Angel and had no weight.

"If your snipers shoot us we will explode the bomb!" They had a gym bag made out of green army type material and from the way they treated it something dangerous was inside.

The little girl started screaming and crying. She was taking huge gasps of air into her lungs and had terror was painted all over her little face. The nanny reached out to her but the fat one continued to hold her away.

It was then that I saw the change in the woman with the stone eyes. Her eyes softened and they filled with tears as her hardness went away. Then she took a breath and leaned over a bit to speak to me and the nanny. "It is not about the little girl, it is not about that. It's that I am late for work. If the two of you will not say anything until I've had a chance to get away, I'll end all of this. But you must keep it from the police for ten minutes. That's all I'll need. Okay?"

I nodded in agreement and the nanny who was crying whispered, "Oh yes, anything to protect the girl."

"Now this has nothing to do with the little girl," she whispered as if to herself. Her eyes resumed their hardness and her nostrils expanded. Her chest seemed larger as she inhaled deeply and the muscles in her hands tensed up like a prize fighter. It was the last thing she said as she leaned forward and wasn't meant for us to hear. Her eyes were concentrating on the two terrorists. The skinny one was yelling on the cell phone to the FBI that they would be sending the little girl's ear next unless they got what they wanted.

Then in one smooth movement her right hand slide inside of her left boot as she pulled her white jeans up on that leg with her left hand. The pistol was that came out in her hand was shiny like the chrome on a car bumper with on the end. It was much smaller than the terrorists' guns. In this continuing swift graceful motion she raised the pistol. I was watching her eyes which never changed, never blinked, never did anything except staring at those two men like an animal staring out of the darkness.

She now had the pistol supported by both hands. She kept both eyes open never blinking. "Bang!" as the bullet sped its way into the skull of the thin one and then turning her shoulders a little, "Bang!" as the fat one turned slightly. Perhaps he got some glimpse of the method that would end his life. As the bullet entered his skull slightly in front of his left ear the energy forced his head to flop over on his right shoulder as he went down. Still in one smooth motion she slipped the shiny pistol back in her boot.

She didn't have to wonder if the two terrorists were dead. She knew. It was her job, like a baker knows how to make bread; she knew how to end a life. Then she rushed forward, grabbed the green army bag, and threw it out the window.

Everyone outside and the unknown accomplice in the crowd must have been watching the bag falling to the street. The woman with the stone eyes gently pushed the little girl into the arms of the nanny.

She seemed to move in slow motion as she picked up both of the terrorists' big pistols. Holding one in each hand she fired three shots into each of their already dead bodies. They shook under the impact as the bullets went through them tearing apart flesh that had already surrendered to death. There was something horrifying about seeing bodies already dead being shot. She then tossed the pistols out the window and pushed the green button which started the tram moving forward toward the station. She picked up the terrorist's cell phone and said, "They got in an argument and shot each other! We've thrown their guns out."

When we got to the tram gate the SWAT team and FBI rushed forward. The woman with the stone eyes reached her hand out to touch the little girl's head where the hair had been cut away and said, "It's Okay honey. Your hair will grow back all pretty." Her eyes had gone soft again and were barely holding the tears back. They were tears that seemed to be a lot like the

ones the little girl had rolling down her face. It was the tears of a little girl that I saw in her eyes before they turned cold again.

She spoke to us before the gondola was flooded with police and FBI agents, "It is not the little girl. In my line of work you can't let things get emotional. It's only that I'm late for work." It was like she was trying to defend herself for what she had done. Sliding past the police as they rushed in she glanced back at the little girl and smiled tenderly at her. I don't think the little girl saw her and in a moment she was lost into the crowd.

Once the facts came out the FBI was more interested in the young woman than they were the terrorists. A man from INTERPOL with a French accent had a lot of questions to ask. I asked if they knew who she was, this young woman that had saved our lives. He shook his head and said they knew very well who she was.

The memory of her has stayed with me many years. I have no idea of where she went, or what she does, or who she is. But the rest of my life, I'll be able to remember the stone coldness in those eyes and the words spoken devoid of human emotion, "late for work."