

A scrawny Asian man with bushy eyebrows and straight tousled black hair stepped in front of her, a small handgun concealed inside a black leather jacket, and he waved toward the door. Desperate to make eye contact with someone in the lobby, Jackie moved slowly. Ignored, she stepped outside and walked to the curb. A dark compact car covered with splashes of dried mud awaited. With a jab to the side, Jackie opened the back passenger door.

“Who are you and what is it you want?” Jackie asked.

The driver’s dark brown eyes shifted to look in the rear view mirror. He tugged at the bill of a blue baseball cap, pulling the hat down as far as it would go. The vehicle accelerated and swerved into traffic. Jackie studied the man next to her. He sat quietly, holding the gun steadily at her mid-section. She controlled her breath, slowing it down, calming her mind, closing her eyes, and tuning out the traffic. Annette’s face flashed in her consciousness, along with two hidden faces exchanging money. She focused on those blurry faces. A Caucasian man she didn’t know had something to do with Annette and this situation. She sensed a street stoplight approaching, and intuition demanded she stay alert and on the lookout for a speeding white coupe.

They drove in silence for several blocks. The car turned left onto a congested street. Bright lights and neon signs identified various establishments. Men of all ages composed the majority of patrons, who entered and exited small shops along the strip. Sidewalks laden with litter led to a lightless alley.

As the car slowed for a traffic light, Jackie smacked her captor’s gun hand to the side. Yelling, he lost his grip on the weapon. She opened the car door and jumped, falling to the curb. A white car sped through the changing stop light. Jackie hopped up and ran, evading squealing tires and blaring car horns.