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Anarchy

Garrett Piglia

You stand before the class, wondering if your students are truly prepared for what's coming. Hidden behind you, on your desk, is a stack of pop quiz papers, and on the opposite end of the desk is a folded up newspaper with a headline that reads: *Leader of Violent Cult Found Guilty—Ruling Restores Order to Metro Area*. You ask yourself how so many young individuals could've formed an allegiance to a madman like Axel Thorne, a man who preaches words like, "Revolt leads to Revolution." They obviously didn't have any proper guidance. You went through the same phase as a teenager, but your teachers were there to help set you on the right path. Because of them you followed in their footsteps to become a teacher, hoping to guide others into becoming productive members of society.

The students are passing around the roll sheet. Class does not officially start for another one minute and sixteen seconds, but their cellphones are all put away, and their uniform shirts are tucked in.

Maria's desk is empty, but you saw her run to the bathroom a few minutes ago. She's an A+ student, so you're sure that she's prepared. On the opposite end of the room is another empty desk—it marks Elizabeth Crater's fifth absence in a row. As much help and advice you've given her, it appears that her home life is a problem again. You swear to yourself that you'll contact her parents during lunchtime and settle this issue once and for all.

The tardy bell rings. The roll sheet is placed in your hand. Everyone is quiet, and all eyes are on you. You stop to take one last look outside the window. This school sits at the top of a hill, high above the city like a temple of knowledge that overlooks a nearby lake. The weather is sunny with a clear blue sky, and the waves in the lake are slowly approaching the shore. Today is the most beautiful and calm Tuesday morning you've seen yet.

You face the class again and clear your throat.

"Good morning students," you say, "we will begin today with a pop—"

POP! POP! POP!

The students turn their attention away from you and look up to the ceiling. It sounds like someone is popping fireworks on the third floor. Screams can be heard from above. Your students are gripping the corners of their desks and looking around in concern.

"Attention," you say, smacking the stack of papers on the desk. "This is obviously some sort of prank. Remain seated while I see what's going on."

Before you open the door to the hallway, you hear someone yell, "Get down!" *Could that be a policeman?* "Hey! Get back here!"

POP! POP!

A girl's scream echoes from the hallway. The students are shrieking, and your hand on the doorknob is shaking. There's no mistake, that sound was a gunshot.

You open the door, expecting to see a police officer, but instead you find Maria lying nearby on the hallway floor, clutching her side. Down the hall you see a man wearing camouflage pants, a tan vest, and a black ski mask that covers everything but his eyes. In his hand is a handgun that's aimed in your direction.

"Should've listened, bitch," he yells, his voice matching the same one as before. A classroom door on the other end of the hall slams shut—it distracts the invader. You seize this moment to grab Maria's arm. With all your strength you pull her towards you as you stumble backwards into the classroom. "Hey!"

POP! POP!

The bullets miss. You manage to get her through the doorway. The other students begin pulling her away from the door. The gunman's loud footsteps are approaching, so you slam the door shut, twist the lock, and turn off the lights. Even after undergoing dozens of drills throughout the school year, the students look terrified and lost.

"Against the wall!" The students heed your orders and huddle against the wall on the hallway side. You crouch beside the door and listen as your heart pounds as hard as the gunman's footsteps.

The gunman starts bashing his hand against the door. "I know you are in there!" You can see the top of his mask through the small square glass window on the door. "Better stay put, kiddies. The party has only begun."

POP! POP! POP!

Screams are coming from all directions. You collapse onto your knees and stare at the floor. You wonder how this all could've happened, how such a man could do this to a school, how none of the security guards were able to stop him, and how such a terrible thing could happen on such a seemingly normal day.

A majority of your students have their cellphones in their hands, dialing numbers or sending texts as fast as their adrenaline would allow. You could hear a cluster of phone conversations all happening in the moment:

"Hello? Yes, we need the police—...another attack? What do you me—"

"Mom? Listen, listen, listen...I just want you to know I love you—"

"Where are the reinforcements? We want help! We want help! We want help!"

"Is it a terrorist attack?"

"Babe? Which floor are you on? Oh God, why is this happening?"

You want to tune them out and concentrate on the matter, but Maria's painful cry reminds you that she's wounded. Some of her friends are holding her; others are trying to examine the wound near her left rib cage. The blood is staining her green uniform shirt.

You push your way over to her.

"Ladies," you say to Maria's friends, "take turns putting pressure on her wound, it should help stop the bleeding until the paramedics arrive. Everyone, let's stay quiet and be patient. We should be expecting the police to arrive here any second now."

Nine minutes and eleven seconds go by. You're staring at your watch and at the same time you can hear the sounds of shivering and sobbing, but no sirens.

You look over to the floor where Maria is lying with her friends. She's breathing fast and cringing with pain. You admire her strength—she has always been such a sweet and strong-minded girl, and even now, with all the pain, you believe that she is still staying strong.

“Teacher,” she shivers out, “I think I’m going to pass out.” You shake your head with disbelief. As strong as she is, her face is now turning pale. Her friends have their blood-soaked hands pressed against her wound, but it’s not enough. They’re all looking at you for guidance, but you never asked for a situation like this. Maria is in trouble though—she needs your help more than ever.

There is a hospital just two miles down the road. Your car is parked in the Teacher of the Month parking space, right outside the emergency stairwell exit. The stairwell is just around the corner of the hallway. Maria’s eyes look weak. She may not make it if she stays.

You take a deep breath. You’re not prepared for this, but you’re willing to adapt to the situation. You order your students to remain quiet in the classroom while you lead Maria out of the school. It’s risky, but you are the teacher, Maria is the student, and right now you’re her only hope.

The students close the door behind you quietly. You wait to hear the lock click.

Click!

They’re safe now, but you are standing out in an empty hallway with Maria. She has her arm over your shoulder for support and she has her right hand pressed over her wound.

“Maria, stay quiet, no matter what,” you whisper. She’s biting her lip, battling the pain, but she still nods in silence.

You walk her down the hall while keeping your eyes and ears open for the gunman. You can hear frantic chattering coming from the nearby classrooms with the lights still on inside. It looks like not every teacher is following the procedures. You’re already formulating a plan to meet with the principal about this matter in an upcoming meeting. In fact, the last time you saw her was last week, when she had Elizabeth Crater in her office.

Elizabeth’s homeroom teacher had sent her to the principal’s office for appearing in class with her hair dyed bright blue. It’s a rule that students can only dye their hair with natural colors, but knowing Elizabeth’s troubled home life, you decided to step into their meeting and defend her. She was sent home for the day, but you saved her from getting another suspension. Elizabeth didn’t thank you; in fact, she never did; but you still promised her that you’d always be there for her if she ever needed help.

On a day as traumatizing as this, you take comfort in knowing that she is somewhere safer than this place, but then you realize that Maria is the one who needs help now. Her legs are getting weaker and her steps are getting shorter.

“You’re doing great Maria,” you say. “Come on, the stairs are just around the corner.” Once you’re down the hall, you lead her to the right where there’s another short hallway. At the end of the hall is the stairwell that leads down to the emergency exit door on the first floor.

“Pick up the pace,” says a strong female voice, echoing from the stairwell, likely from the third floor.

Your heart races. Your body begins to shake. Above you the ceiling lights are flickering. To the left is a classroom with the door shut. To the right is an opened custodian closet—*that’ll have to do!*

“Maria, the closet—quietly,” you whisper with a shaky voice. She drags her feet towards the closet while still hanging on you. You both cram yourselves in, pushing aside a broom, a mop, and a box of trash bags.

You hear footsteps coming down the stairs and into the hallway. You freeze, realizing you did not close the closet door all the way. There’s no time, the footsteps sound like they’re getting closer. You look to Maria. She helplessly looks back to you. And then you smell something—*gasoline!*

“All right Liz, take care of this floor, I’m going to get things started downstairs.” It is a man’s voice, matching the same one that shot Maria.

“Any word from the others?” the female asks in a loud whisper. “Were they able to rescue Thorne?”

“Not yet, but fuck it, we can’t stay here. Just take care of this floor and I’ll handle the rest. In Thorne we trust.”

“In Thorne we trust,” the female repeated. “Good luck.”

“You too.”

Heavy footsteps echo from the stairs. Shortly after, you peek out into the hallway and spot a figure walking backwards towards you. It’s another masked individual, wearing the same clothes as the one from before, but you’re sure that this must be the female that was talking before. She’s holding a large red canister of gas on an angle, allowing gasoline to pour out of the long clear nozzle. She appears to be making a trail with the gasoline down the hall.

She couldn’t be—! At this moment you see that Maria is still battling with the pain, and in seconds the masked female will be passing the closet and turning the corner—it’ll be your chance to escape. However, if she starts a fire then the students hiding in the classrooms on the second and third floor could die. You hear no sirens, no security guards—no help at all. There is only you, Maria, and the masked girl in the hall. You have to make a quick decision.

A red fire extinguisher is on the wall above Maria’s head. You unhook it from the wall and look down to Maria. She slightly nods her head to you. You stare out to the hall right as the girl passes it. Her head is down, eyeing the trail of gasoline, so she doesn’t notice you. As soon as she passes, you tighten your hands around the extinguisher, and then charge forward.

The door flies open all the way. You rush towards the masked female. She immediately drops the canister and reaching for something behind her. You’re closing in, readying to swing the extinguisher, when suddenly your foot slips on the gasoline. Your whole body slides forward, knocking into her legs. The weight of her body crashes on your chest. Her boot’s heel slams into your face. You drop

the extinguisher to use your hands to push her off. As you shove her onto the floor, a metal object falls from her hand and slides a few feet to the side. She's frantically trying to crawl over to the object, right as you realize that it's a handgun. You grab her ankle and pull her back. She kicks her legs and wiggles herself around. Her mask has shifted to the side, covering up one of her eyes. She reacts by pulling the mask off with her free hand. You reach for her arm, but then you freeze in dismay.

Her face...that blue hair—*it's Elizabeth Crater!*

"Elizabeth," you say, perplexed.

She looks enraged.

You feel a sharp pain against your arm. In your disillusionment, you failed to notice that she had taken a switchblade knife from her pocket and lunged it into your arm. She removes it and prepares to stab the blood-dripping blade into you again, but you move back from her reach and stand up.

The pain in your arm is unimaginable, but there's no time to examine it. Elizabeth's relentless glare is aimed in your direction. She's on all fours, baring her teeth like a wolf. She has the knife underneath her palm.

"Elizabeth, don't—" you stop when you notice her quick glance over to the handgun on the floor. Right now she's looking back at you with that wild stare.

This girl is your student, and you are her teacher. You want to help her, and she wants to kill you. You want to talk to her, and she wants to kill you. This school is like a temple of knowledge, and she wants to burn it down. Her classmates are still sitting in a dark classroom, and she wants to burn it down. All the students and teachers are here in this building, and she wants to burn it down. And Maria—it was Elizabeth's accomplice who shot her, and does she care? She's lying in that closet, dying, and does she care? And if Maria lives, she'll be scarred for life, physically, mentally, emotionally—and does she care?

The pain in your arm fades away. Your focus is on Elizabeth. She is your student and you are her teacher. She wants to kill you, and you have to stop her. She wants to burn this school down, and you have to stop her. Maria needs you, so you will stop her.

This is no temple of knowledge; it is a hunk of cement and metal pipes. She is not your student; she is a human like you. In survival there are no laws, no rules, no titles, no meaning and no society. There is only the predator and the prey. She wants to kill you, and you will fight to survive, no matter what.

She roars loudly and hurls herself forward, running towards you with the knife aimed at your face. You snatch her wrist with your right hand, grab the collar of her vest with your left, and push her against the wall. She sinks her teeth into your left hand. You pull your hand back and swipe your palm against her head. She growls, and then uses her free hand to claw your face with her nails. You howl with pain, but you refuse to release your right hand. You take your left hand and wrap your fingers against her neck. She gags as you tighten your grip. You continue to suffocate her, even as her eyes appear to be rolling to the back of her head. Finally, her hand drops the knife; in fact her whole arm appears to have lost all its strength.

You spot the gun on the floor, and then turn back to her. Her face is bright red with tears in her eyes. You decide to release your grip, and she collapses to the ground. Your hands are shaking as you look to the gun and approach it. The pain in your arm is starting to return, but then you feel an even more intense pain on back of your left leg.

You look back to see Elizabeth, while coughing and gasping for air, taking her knife and repeatedly stabbing the blade into your leg. Your leg gives out and you tumble onto the floor. She begins to crawl towards you, raising her bloodstained knife above your spine. You fling your arms forward and feel the gun's handle. You take it, realizing it is the only thing that can save you now. You wrap your fingers around the handle, slip your index finger onto the trigger, and turn it towards Elizabeth.

She raises her knife. You raise the gun.

POP!

“Get down!” A powerful voice echoes from the staircase, stirring you out of your daze. You're sitting in the hall with your back against the wall. Elizabeth is lying before you with her hands pressed against the base of her neck. She's struggling to breathe, but after a few seconds you see her hands drop to her sides. She looks hopelessly to the flickering light on the ceiling with her eyes half closed. You notice the gun in your hand, and then toss it away. You stretch your hand out, reaching for hers, but before you can you hear a loud wheezing sound escape from her breath. Her breathing stops. She's not moving anymore.

It is too late.

A pack of men dressed in black body armor with POLICE printed on them come up the stairwell. Their assault rifles are drawn in your direction.

“We found another one,” says the man in the front of the pack.

They begin to approach you, but you just shake your head and point to the closet. They examine it and find Maria inside. They say something about “critical condition” and carry her away while the others begin to investigate the classrooms.

About an hour later, you are carried out of the building on a stretcher that is being pulled towards an ambulance outside the school. From here you can see several stacks of smoke rising up from the city. News reporters all around you are talking in front of TV cameras:

“The attacks took place in several locations—...hospitals, police stations—”

“—attempt to cause chaos and confusion—...free Axel Thorne from custody—”

“—tried to set fire to the school, but were stopped by law enforcement—”

“The sheriff stated that order has been restored...”

“So far there's no clear number on the casualties. Back to you, Reda.”

The paramedics are preparing to load you up into the ambulance. Before they do, you see your students standing together beside you. They all have tears in their eyes. Many of them are nodding their heads, and whispering, "Thank you."

You never wanted to be thanked, not for something like this. You only wanted to teach, and guide your students, but even then you could not save Elizabeth. Even worse, there were others like her out there; those that could not be helped, those who wanted to break away from the norm and do the unthinkable. And those living their lives peacefully, going to work, studying in school, or raising a family, they would see the news and think that it could never happen to them, but if the time comes, would they be truly prepared for it? Could they find the strength to live on in the wake of anarchy?

They're about to put you in the ambulance when a policeman steps over to you and pats your shoulder. "Don't worry, everything's going to be all right now."

You stare over to the city skyline, where black smoke is still rising up to the clear, bright blue sky.

While shaking your head, you say, "Let's keep dreaming."