

The Turning Shadows

Chapter One

When the doors of the south elevator of New York City's Renault Building opened on the upper garage level, its only occupant, Mia Childress, stood unmoving. Her attention was fully fixed upon her iPhone. Her girlfriends, who had gotten off work at a normal hour, awaited her presence at the Nomad. With fingers moving at frightening speed, she finished her text, telling Janice of her impending departure from work, and stepped through the doors of the elevator just as they closed.

She dropped the phone in her purse, a black-leather Coach shoulder bag, mussed her curly blonde hair with one hand, and looked up with pale blue-gray eyes to scan the garage. Like most things in the Renault Building, the garage was clean, well-lit, and nearly empty.

She exhaled briskly with annoyance at being forced, once again, to spend an extra two hours in the office on a Friday evening. Her boss, Vice-President of Marketing Julia James, went by JJ among her friends.

No one in the office called Julia James JJ.

With a deeper sigh, Mia began the long walk to her Toyota Rav4, lamenting as she walked the new policies her organization had enacted on equal-opportunity employment. Her company insisted on providing opportunities for minorities and women to succeed in the business. While Mia had benefited herself, advancing quite high in the ranks in only 18 months of employment, she found herself lamenting the loss of her previous boss. Herb Anderson had been a balding fifty-year old, overweight, slovenly, male chauvinist whose overly large suits made him look more than a little clownlike. All Mia, an attractive 24-year-old, had to do was look up and bat her eyes at him, and he would agree to anything she wanted.

Unfortunately, his replacement Julia James was unimpressed with Mia's Lancome-enhanced lashes. When expense reports needed to be done, Julia James wanted them done immediately, even if that meant working until 7:15pm on a Friday night.

Seeing her red Rav4 ahead, Mia quickened her pace, anxious to catch up with her girls and get her weekend going. That's when the lights went out, and she froze, completely

enveloped in darkness. Maintaining her poise, Mia took a couple of deep breaths to collect herself. She had just dropped her cell phone into her purse.

She sighed, retrieving the phone with her left hand, and smoothly unlocking it with her left index finger as she pulled it from the purse. The display lit up, and with her right index finger she pulled down from the top, revealing a menu bar with several icons, including one resembling a flashlight. She fingered the icons several times until she got the right one, and her phone cast a cone of light into the dark garage.

Mia lifted the phone in the direction of her Rav4, and froze at the sight of the tall, shadowy figure, who was approaching her with a large, butcher's knife.

The figure paused momentarily, frozen either by the sudden light or the visceral, primal scream that began in Mia's twisted stomach increasing in amplification until it tore from her open mouth. The pause was brief. The knife-wielder resumed his approach, only a dozen feet away.

Mia stood paralyzed, unable to move, as the light from the phone illuminated her approaching killer. The scream ended along with the supply of oxygen in her now-emptied lungs. She began to feel dizzy, her exhausted lungs no longer refilling involuntarily.

Her killer was only a few steps away now, and Mia remained paralyzed, awaiting her fate.

Movement behind the man caught Mia's eye, and the paralysis broke, at least enough for Mia's head to crane slightly to her right, and she saw another, sligher figure emerge from the darkness behind the killer.

Mia's movement and attention brought the knife-wielder to a halt. He turned, first his head, then seeing the second figure, the rest of his body followed in a stiff, jerky fashion.

The second figure, female it appeared to Mia, exploded into motion, moving with liquid grace. Her left foot swept around in an arc, impacting the killer's right hand, sending his knife tumbling into the darkness. With speed that made Mia's typing look slow, the newcomer continued spinning full circle, bringing up her left foot which impacted the left side of the man's face.

The man grunted in pain and staggered back a step before lurching forward, throwing a huge haymaker at his adversary. She stepped forward, pushing the punch up and away with her left hand. As the man sought to rebalance himself, her right hand shot up, palm open, and impacted the man's nose with an audible crunch.

Not pausing for a second, she reached up and grasped the man's head in both hands, yanking it viciously down as her right knee rose to meet it. Another scream pierced the darkness, this one originating from the man.

The man began to stagger back a step, but his attacker once again stepped forward, reaching her right arm under his extended right arm. She swiveled her hips as she pulled, and the man was launched over her shoulder, impacting the concrete floor of the garage spine first.

Still without pausing, the newcomer dropped to the ground sliding forward. Her legs wrapped around the man's torso, while her right arm encircled his exposed neck. He didn't scream, couldn't scream, as her rear-naked choke cut off his oxygen supply, and the darkness took him.