



A SINGLE SHOT

WHEN HER WORLD SHATTERED,
HE BECAME HER SHIELD.

TRACY WAINWRIGHT

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CHAPTER 1

Terrence flipped through the show options on his TV. Another evening at home alone with nothing to do but either reflect on things he didn't want to think about or distract himself with a bunch of men fighting over some type of ball. He settled on a recap of all the college bowl games and predictions about the professional playoffs. Maybe that'd help him fall asleep before midnight—something he hadn't been able to do in the last week despite still getting up at six to work out and then working all day.

Too much paperwork. He needed an active case. One to occupy his mind and stop him from ruminating on the one he'd just closed.

His eyes grew heavy, and he scooted down in the sofa to rest his head against the back cushion.

His phone buzzed somewhere close by. He opened his eyes and yawned, getting his bearings. He must have fallen asleep after all. Had he slept on the sofa all night, though? Didn't feel like it. And no light shone through the window blinds.

He focused on the sound of his phone vibrating and located it on the kitchen table. Rising, he strode across the room and answered. "Hello?"

“Terrence!” a woman exclaimed. “Oh, thank goodness. Terrence, I need your help. Please come help. My brother’s been shot.”

He shook off the fog in his head and worked to place the voice. He recognized it but couldn’t match a face and name to it. Maybe if he kept her talking. “Where are you?”

“I’m at Peter’s Pub.” She sobbed. “They’ve taken him to the hospital. I don’t think I can drive. I’ve had a couple offers, but everyone here is toasted or close to it or a complete stranger. Plus, I don’t know if the police will let me leave yet.”

Maggie. How could he not have recognized her voice right away? “I’ll be there in eight minutes.”

“Thanks,” she cried.

Terrence slipped on his shoes. “Want to stay on the phone while I head that way?”

“No, I need to talk to the cops here. They let me stay with Cosmo until the medics took him away, but I know they have questions for me.”

So did he.

He grabbed his keys from the hook near the door. “See you in a few.” Terrence took off, lights and sirens blaring. He hadn’t known Maggie had a brother. Truthfully, he knew very little about her, other than she worked at Colonial Williamsburg, was friends with the Montgomeries, was beautiful, and had the sweetest demeanor. That she’d been at Peter’s Pub late in the night shocked him. He didn’t picture her as the partying type. At least that wasn’t the impression he’d gotten the two times he’d met her. The first while

working Julie's case, and the second at the party the Montgomerys' church had thrown after Julie returned safely home.

He paused at a stop sign and turned on his scanner. "Shooting suspect on the run. Last seen at the corner of Courthouse and Center Street. Fleeing on foot."

Terrence crossed the intersection and ran the layout of the area through his head. In Williamsburg, there wasn't much tourist traffic in January, and very few places were open past ten. The guy could have a car in a variety of parking lots close by. But he'd fled the opposite direction of the main parking lot used by the patrons of Peter's Pub. If the perp had circled back, it'd have taken him a minute to get there. Or had he parked on the street? There was no way to know.

The list of what Terrence didn't know extended. How long after the shooting had the cops arrived on scene? Where had they looked? How many officers had been called in? Did they have a name or description of the shooter?

"Guy is mid-twenties, wearing blue jeans and dark hoodie."

"Great." That answered one question but didn't provide any real help. No race, height, or other distinguishing characteristic. Dude was an average Joe. At least from what they knew so far. Maybe by the time he arrived, the guys on scene would have more information. Maybe Maggie would know the guy. Part of him hoped she'd be able to give them a name, and part of him hoped she didn't know such a scumbag.

Two doors from the restaurant, Terrence pulled up behind another squad car. Dozens of patrons milled about in the cold while a handful of cops took statements.

He opened the car door and lamented not grabbing a coat. At least he kept his beanie in the car. He slipped it on his head and, as he stepped into the cold night, hoped the covering would help keep the chilled air from turning him into a popsicle. He tucked his hands into his front pockets as he met the eyes of a fellow cop. He lifted his chin. "Harris. What 'cha got?"

"Thanks, ma'am," Harris wrapped up his interview with a scantily clad woman.

How was she not freezing? Another young woman wrapped her arms around the girl, and they cried together as they walked away. They didn't look old enough to be at the bar, but that wasn't his problem right now.

"Not much," Harris answered. "No one so far saw anything. Or so they say. Other than the vic's sister. Patterson's over there questioning her." He nodded toward the pair.

"Patterson's on tonight?"

Harris nodded. "Yeah. Switched shifts with someone. Don't really know the scoop."

"Great. Thanks." Terrence strode over to Patterson and Maggie.

"Oh, Terrence." Maggie wiped tears off her cheeks and pulled her coat tighter. Her teeth chattered. The cold or shock? Probably both.

Terrence resisted the urge to wrap her in his arms

and faced Patterson. "What's the status?"

"You're not on today."

"Nope." Terrence glanced at Maggie. "Got a call from a friend."

"Which puts you too close to investigate."

Terrence rolled his eyes. "This is Williamsburg. And friend is probably too strong a word. Maggie filled in for Julie Montgomery when she went missing. We met a couple times because of that case."

Patterson shifted his gaze to Maggie and studied her. "Oh, right."

"You done with her?" Terrence asked. "I'm sure she wants to get to the hospital."

"Yeah." Patterson flipped his notebook closed. "Call me if you think of anything else. I'll check back in a couple days, too."

"OK." Maggie shivered.

"I'll keep you updated." Terrence turned toward Maggie and motioned to his right. "My car's down there."

"What about my car? I drove Cosmo here." Maggie's teeth continued to chatter.

"We'll take care of that tomorrow." He checked the time. "Or later today, such that it is."

"OK."

Terrence led her to his car, opened the passenger door for her, and then rounded the hood. He slipped into his seat and cranked the heat to high. "They take him to Regional?"

"Yeah. I think. I mean, I didn't ask. But it's the closest." She wiped the tears still running down her

cheeks.

Terrence checked the blotter and found her assumption and his was correct. He put the car in gear and headed the wrong direction.

“He’s not there?”

“He is. We’ll avoid the traffic this way.”

She twisted around and stared out the back window until the flashing lights faded.

He didn’t turn on his lights or siren. No need to rush. He’d caught some information that diminished his hope Maggie’s brother had survived. Very few people lived after getting shot in the head. Next to none.

He hoped she hadn’t heard some of the lamentations people gave. Of course, she’d been there and had seen the injury first hand, so she must not have much hope already.

Weaving his way around and through the area, he made it to a main road that would take them to the hospital.

“I can’t believe this happened. And that I was there.” Her voice broke on a sob. “I just can’t believe it.” She swiped at more tears.

“Why don’t you tell me what happened,” he prompted.

She hiccupped and sighed. “I went with Cosmo to celebrate his twenty-first birthday. I don’t do the bar scene; but he begged, and honestly, I thought I could keep him out of trouble. At the very least, make sure he had a sober ride home.” She swallowed a sob. “Never did I imagine the night would end like this.”

So, his instincts were right after all. "Go on," Terrence said.

"Everything was great until that guy got mad." She turned to stare out the window.

"What guy?" Terrence asked.

"I don't know who he was. White guy, dark hair. About my age. A couple inches taller than Cosmo."

"What upset him?"

"Cosmo flirting. Which he does all the time. He's such a player. Even though he loves me and treats me great, he acts like other women don't have a brother or father or are worth much." She played with the tie on her coat.

"What happened exactly?"

"He didn't do anything, really. Asked this girl if he could buy her a drink. She said, 'Sure'. Then this guy stormed up to them and demanded to know what was going on. The girl said she wasn't about to turn down a free drink, and they got into an argument. She looped her arm through Cosmo's and walked him to the bar. The guy's face got all red, but his buddies held him back.

"That was twenty minutes before we left. I don't know what happened to him or to the girl after she got her drink. I didn't see them again." She started crying again.

After a few seconds, she reined in the tears. "Until we left. He ran up, shouted something like he'd show Cosmo to keep his hands off other people's girls, and pulled out a gun. Cosmo stepped toward him to grab the gun, but the guy fired off a shot too quick." She

sobbed. "I can't believe it. The whole thing was stupid. Nothing that doesn't happen every weekend. All he did was buy the girl a drink."

"Did he call your brother by his name?"

She stayed quiet for a full minute. "No, I don't think so. He called him some colorful words. Not his name, though."

"So, he doesn't know your brother?"

"I guess not. I really don't know." She twisted in the seat to face him. "I love my brother, but he's a mess. Got in with a bad crowd in high school after my dad left. I try to help. Tell him he's being an idiot, but he won't listen."

"We can't make our loved ones do the right thing. Can't make those choices for them." Terrence had plenty of family members who'd chosen bad paths in life.

"Don't I know it." She straightened and leaned back against the headrest. "I don't even know if he's still alive," she whispered.

She'd know soon enough. Terrence steered into the parking lot and pulled the car into a spot near the emergency room entrance. He refused to offer her any false hope or platitudes. They'd know in moments what the situation was.

CHAPTER 2

Maggie rushed to the reception window.

"Hi, may I help you?" the receptionist asked.

"I'm here for Cosmo Rogers." She couldn't bring herself to ask if he'd made it to the hospital.

The woman met Maggie's gaze. "You're family?"

"Yes, I'm his sister."

"I have some paperwork for you."

Tears filled her eyes. "Is he OK? Can you just tell me what's going on with him?"

The woman shifted her gaze to the computer screen. She typed on her keyboard. "He's in surgery."

Maggie gripped the counter. He'd made it. He hadn't died on the way to the hospital. Terrence supported her elbow. "What do you need from me?" she asked the receptionist.

The woman grabbed a tablet and handed it to her. "Fill this out as much as possible."

Maggie accepted the offering. Terrence walked with her to the waiting area, not letting go of her arm until she sank into a chair. He sat beside her. She was so glad not to be alone, although, had she thought for thirty seconds in the middle of her panic, she wouldn't have had the courage to call him.

Maggie filled out the basic identifying and

demographic sections. Then she got stuck. "I don't even know if he has a primary care physician, much less who it is."

"That doesn't matter right now. Just answer what you can." His strong, deep voice soothed her ragged nerves.

She nodded and returned to the tablet, marking the items she knew. Once done, she walked it back to the receptionist, waiting as the woman checked in a mom with a whiny toddler. The mom juggled the kid and the device the woman handed her and moved from the desk.

"All done?" the receptionist asked.

"Yeah," Maggie answered. "I didn't know a whole lot."

"That's OK." She accepted the information. "It's enough for us to start his record."

"When will I know something?" Maggie sucked in her bottom lip.

The woman lifted her gaze to meet Maggie's. "I'm not sure. I'll let the head nurse know you're here."

"Thanks." She returned to her seat where Terrence let her sit quietly with her thoughts. She was grateful he didn't push her to talk or ask her a million questions.

She stared at the virtual aquarium hung on the wall opposite their seats. There was something calming about watching fish and other sea creatures move around in water, even if just a picture. She took a deep breath and released it.

"You doing OK?" Terrence asked.

Tears filled her eyes again, and she turned toward him. "Not really. I mean, I'm amazed Cosmo survived. I guess that means I'm a whole lot more OK than I expected to be once we arrived. I'd thought he was dead until the EMT's arrived and started working on him and then had no idea if he'd survive the trip to the hospital."

"Someone must have helped him on the scene."

Her eyes widened. "Yes, there was a girl. I didn't get her name. How can I thank her?"

"Patterson may have her name. What'd she do?"

"She wrapped her coat around his head, tying the sleeves to pull it tight. I couldn't do anything." A tear slipped down her cheek. "I should have done something. My brother was shot in the head, and all I could do was scream. It was like I was frozen."

"People have different reactions to trauma. You know the fight or flight thing? Well, some people freeze. It's not anything you can control."

"I don't know..."

Terrence reached over and covered her hand. "I do. I deal with trauma all the time, remember? I've seen all sorts of situations and reactions. How we cope is a combination of how we're made, what our experiences are, and how we train ourselves."

She shook her head. "I don't know how you do it."

He grinned. "I was made for it. Adrenaline kicks me into a higher functioning mode. Just because it doesn't do that for you doesn't mean something is wrong with you. I could never do your job, dealing with thousands of tourists day in and day out."

Learning about how crafters worked hundreds of years ago. Memorizing all those details and sharing them over and over."

She waved a hand in front of her. "Oh, my job's not hard. What you do is incredibly difficult."

"I love the challenge. And the rewards. I'd guess you feel the same about your job."

She stared into his dark eyes. He was doing a good job of distracting her. "I do love it. I get to meet people from all over the world."

"See." He shook his head. "I'll stick with a few people at a time and cases to solve. I always did like a good puzzle."

Puzzles drove her crazy. The corner of her lips turned up. "I guess we're both in the right career."

"Yep." He squeezed her hand. "Speaking of which, do you remember anything else from tonight? Any snippet about the guy or his girlfriend. Any small detail may be helpful."

She thought back to the chaotic scene outside of the pub. Then back to the initial interaction inside. She closed her eyes, attempting to picture the guy. Going through the scene in her mind for the hundredth time. There! Her eyes popped open. "He has a small scar above his eyebrow."

"Good. Which one?"

She reviewed the picture in her mind. Right. No, on her right. "Left." She lifted her index finger to the spot on her face. "About here."

"That's great." He pulled out his phone, opened it, and typed a note. "Anything else?"

She played back the scene in her mind once more.
“He has dark eyes.”

“Excellent. What else?”

She couldn't think one more thing about the guy.
“I don't know. That's all I can remember. I'm sorry I'm so bad at this. I just didn't think much about it or pay that much attention to him.”

“It's OK. That was good. We'll get you with a sketch artist tomorrow.” He checked his watch and grinned. “Later today. After you've had some rest. We'll find this guy. I promise.”

Her mind hadn't even thought that far. She was worried about Cosmo and whether he'd live. And how he'd be if he did. What damage had the bullet inflicted? What part of his brain was impacted? Would he be able to walk? Talk? Process information?

Terrence stood. “Gonna be a long night. I'm going to hunt down some coffee. Want one?”

“No, thanks. A soda maybe?”

“Sure. What kind?”

“Whatever they have.”

“I'll be right back.” He turned and walked through a set of doors leading into the main part of the hospital.

Left alone, Maggie surveyed the emergency waiting room. Not too many people at the E.R. in their small town at this hour. The mom with the sick toddler sat cuddling him. An older couple sat holding hands. That was it.

Maggie needed something to keep her mind occupied. Something other than worrying about Cosmo and replaying the interactions with the guy

who shot him.

Terrence strode through the door, a coffee cup in one hand and a soda in the other. "Here you go." He sat.

"Thanks."

"Any word?"

"No." She popped open the bottle and took a sip, letting the sweet, fuzzy caffeine fill her mouth as her eyes once again filled with tears. "I need something else to think about."

"You have any other siblings?" he asked.

"No, just me and Cosmo." Her eyes widened. "I need to call my mom. I can't believe I haven't let her know yet."

"Why don't you wait until you hear something? No need in waking her in the middle of the night to come and sit and be worried with you."

Maggie pondered his words. He was right. She loved her mom, but the woman wouldn't be any comfort. She'd cry and fret and heighten Maggie's already anxious heart. "OK. I guess you have a point. Better to wait." She hated that the decision was mostly selfish. But truly, what would it help her mom to worry longer? No, Maggie would wait to call until Cosmo was out of surgery and she talked to a doctor.

"You grow up around here?" Terrence interrupted her thoughts.

"Yeah. Well, since I was four. We moved here from North Carolina."

"Job change?"

She nodded. "My dad got a job with the paper

mill.”

“West Point. But y’all moved to Williamsburg.”

She shrugged. “Upper part of the county so it wasn’t too far. My mom got a job in town, so they split the difference.”

“You didn’t mention calling him.”

Taking another sip and turning toward him, she met and held his gaze. “He took off a few years ago. I don’t really know where. We haven’t heard from him since he sent the last child support check a year after leaving. Never was much of a father anyway. That’s when Cosmo started going downhill.”

“Something I see all the time.” Terrence shook his head. “Doesn’t have to be that way, though.”

“Yeah, but I’ve heard the statistics.” She knew all too well how much more likely kids without dads around, especially guys, got into trouble with drugs, the law, or both. She’d done her own research on the topic until she decided the stats weren’t doing anything to help her peace of mind or to get Cosmo to change course.

“That’s no excuse. Some people grow up without a dad and make the decision to stick to the right paths.”

Maggie studied him. “You know that firsthand.”

“My dad’s never been around. Disappeared the moment my mom told him she was pregnant.”

“I’m guessing your mom’s a strong woman.” That was the difference Maggie tended to see in how fatherless children turned out. She and Cosmo didn’t have that.

He grinned. “Like steel.”

Unlike her own mom; she was about as strong as a twig. Maggie sipped her soda and glanced at the reception desk. A woman with a huge stomach and a very excited man checked in. A nurse burst through the swinging doors to the right of the check-in area and swept them back into the hospital. A few moments later, another nurse opened the door leading into the emergency department and called the older couple back.

When would Cosmo be out of surgery? What if something had gone wrong?

"Tell me about your mom," Terrence broke into her musings again, distracting her from her anxious thoughts.

"She loves Cosmo and me, no doubt. But she's clueless about how her actions and words impact us. She's never shied away from letting us know how much work and expense we are."

"Kids are," Terrence said. "That's called being a parent."

"I know. I'd never say such things to my children. She didn't have much growing up and has worked hard her whole life. My dad was a horrible money manager, so we didn't have a lot then, either, and then she was left as the sole provider."

"Where does she work?"

"At the outlets," Maggie answered. "She got promoted to a manager last year. Since Cosmo and I are both out of the house, she's doing better. I think she's had a negative perspective so long it's become ingrained in her, though. Even when things go well,

she has to point out what could go wrong.”

“Guess she’s learned life isn’t all butterflies and roses.”

Maggie unbuttoned her coat. She’d warmed up plenty sitting in the waiting room for so long. “There are bees and thorns, for sure, but we get to decide which we focus on.” She glanced at him. “I’d rather think about the positive than the negative. Even though I’m having a hard time doing so right now. I guess not hearing anything is good at this point, though.”

He cocked his head. “Even now, you see the positive?”

“My brother survived getting shot in the head, so, yeah. I think that’s amazing. God is merciful in this fallen, broken world.” She swallowed the lump in her throat. “Even if Cosmo doesn’t survive.” She had to believe that. Cling to the truths she had accepted and rooted into her thinking. If Cosmo didn’t live, her biggest grief would be him dying before surrendering his life to the Lord.

Terrence sipped his coffee instead of responding.

Did he believe in God? Having met his mom a month before, Maggie got the impression the woman was one of faith. Actually, it’d been blatantly obvious. What about Terrence, though? She hadn’t spent enough time with him to know even that most important detail. The moment at hand didn’t seem like the right time to ask. That conversation would have to wait. Assuming they’d have more of those in the future that didn’t focus on Cosmo and his case.