

Chapter One

Fighting Back

Margo Bennett was barely one step inside the lobby at the Prince of Peace United Methodist Church when the door to the sanctuary burst open to her right. A man, dressed in black and a stocking cap with eye holes, leapt in front of her. He was holding a gun.

“Margo, don’t fight me on this,” he commanded.

She recognized the voice instantly. It was her estranged husband, Gene, a former FBI agent, just like her.

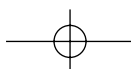
Margo reacted instinctively, raising her hand and shooting a stream of pepper spray toward his head. As she saw him stagger backwards, she knew that she’d hit him, she hoped in the face. She also knew she had only a split second to run for cover before he’d come after her.

Racing into the office of her minister, the Reverend Edwin Clever, she dove for his desk in the corner. She landed on her hands and knees, scrambled behind the short end, and turned her body toward the doorway.

Still holding the pepper spray in one hand, she dug frantically in her purse for her gun. Gene, looking for an advantage, poked his head around the door frame several times. Each time he did, she sprayed him—once, twice, three more times.

By the fifth spray, she noticed that the stream had significantly less force. She was scared that Gene had noticed, too. But by then she’d gotten her finger curled around the trigger of her .38.

“You’re not going to kill me, Gene,” she said. “I am not going to let this happen.”



2 TWISTED TRIANGLE

Gene stuck his head around the doorway again. "I don't want to kill you, I just want to talk to you," he said, as if he were trying to sound sincere. "If I'd wanted to kill you, I could have had you any time."

"If you wanted to talk to me," she snapped, "you could have called me on the phone. I'm not coming out. You are not going to do this."

Crouched behind the desk, Margo pointed her gun at the spot where she'd last seen Gene's head. A stack of letter trays was partially obstructing her view, so she knocked them onto the floor with one swipe.

"What do you want to do, get into a shootout?" Gene asked. The feigned sincerity had evolved into irritation that his ploy wasn't working. "We can get in a shootout and see who's the best shot."

"I don't care Gene, I am not coming out there."

"Edwin has got explosives around his waist. I'll kill us all. Come on, let's talk, or we'll all die," he said, the frustration in his voice rising. "Do you want to die?"

"You want to blow us up, blow us up," she said. "But I'm not coming out there."

She could see her minister in his secretary's office, sitting in a green leather chair with a beige cloth bag over his head, his hands cuffed behind him, shackles around his ankles, and a bulging fanny pack around his waist.

"Edwin, are you all right?"

"I think so," he replied, his voice quiet and shaky.

Margo's adrenaline was high, and her fear had been overtaken by a clear focus and the drive to survive. Her choices would not be clouded as they were when Gene had attacked and abducted her three years earlier, in 1993. He could kill her as far as she was concerned, but she wasn't going to let him break her like he had the last time. She'd rather die than let him touch her again.

“You know I’m going to leave here and go and get the kids,” he said. “You know I’m going to have to go through Letta. Is that what you want?”

Gene had already shown that he would use their two daughters to get to her during the last attack. That’s what had made her cave in. But she didn’t believe that he’d hurt her sister, Letta. The risk was too great that he’d get caught.

Even so, she didn’t want to call his bluff. If she could keep him yelling and screaming, she figured he wouldn’t have time to think. If she could keep him off guard, she and Edwin would have a chance to make it out alive. She was determined not to let Gene violate her or her girls again.

“Gene, just do what you have to do,” she said, stalling for time. “Get out of here. Just leave. I’m not coming out.”

Truth be told, she saw no way out. Gene was blocking the only door out of the office. And there were no windows. She knew he wasn’t going to leave, no matter what he said.

“Edwin, are you ready to die?” she shouted. “’Cause I don’t know how we’re going to get out of this.”

Edwin sighed. “I was afraid of that,” he said.

“Are you praying?”

“I’ve been praying,” Edwin said.

“Pray for me too,” she said. “I’m a little busy right now.”

Gene poked his head and his gun around the doorframe once more. Margo wondered why he didn’t pull the trigger. He’d have such an easy shot at her. Her only choice, she decided, was to fire first. With any luck, she would hit the sliver of pale forehead he kept showing her like a target.

And that, she hoped, would be that.

