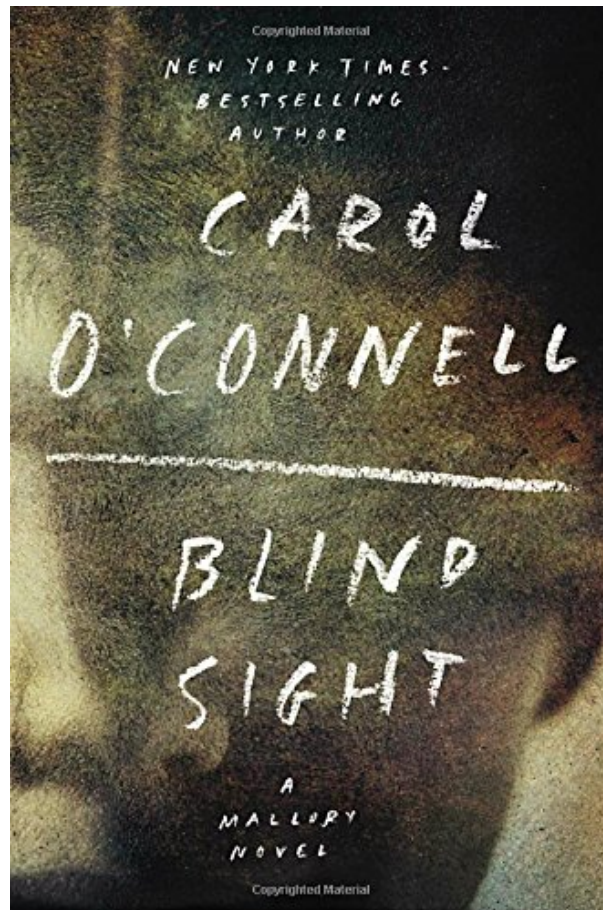
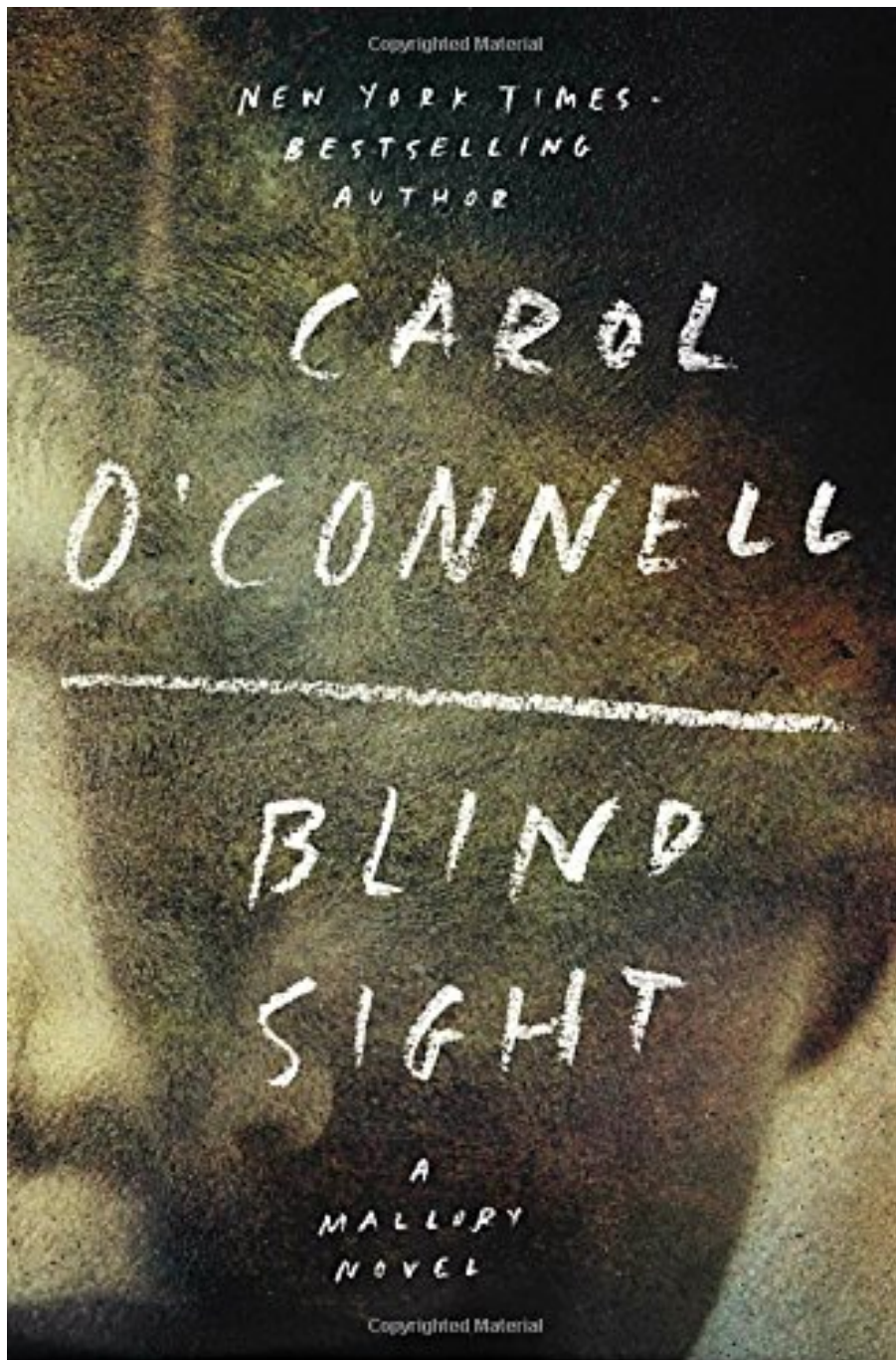


BLIND SIGHT (A MALLORY NOVEL) BY CAROL O'CONNELL



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Review

Praise for *Blind Sight*

“Carol O'Connell's latest novel featuring Special Crimes Unit Detective Kathy Mallory has an almost Dickensian feel. In her own way, O'Connell is as quirky and elusive as Mallory. [F]or those readers looking to escape the usual police procedurals, she's the ticket.” — Chicago Tribune

“O'Connell's 12th Mallory novel has all of her trademarks: a twisty puzzle, page-turning suspense, and a dark and complex city of corruption. Above all is the cool, scary Mallory, who sees through the smokescreen of civility to the violence within. As one character says, ‘Vengeance, thy name is Mallory.’...A solid entry -- The mystery is satisfyingly complex, and the pace makes it hard to put down.” — Library Journal

“Kathy Mallory's twelfth outing showcases the unparalleled characterization and powerful backstory that have made this a bar-raising hard-boiled series ... Mallory's street-sharpened tactics are as riveting as ever.” — Booklist, starred review

“As in previous novels, Mallory's quirky personality shows "just a hint of crazy," and sometimes, to unnerve people, she drops "every pretense of being human." She's an entertaining, slightly over-the-top protagonist with brains and attitude. Colorful and appealing (or appalling) characters make this one a winner for crime-fic fans.” — Kirkus, starred review

“Both slickly cool and hot to the touch, Carol O'Connell's *Blind Sight* is a master class in suspense. As her detective hero, the inscrutable and fascinating Mallory, plunges into darker and darker terrain, we feel lucky—thrilled—to be along for the ride.”

—New York Times bestselling author MEGAN ABBOTT

“Do I really need to say anything other than Mallory is back? And she's darker, more sly and disturbing than ever. Carol O'Connell is at her finest in this addictive, riveting, stylish, powerful psychological thriller. Once again, she's raised the bar for crime fiction.”

— M. J. ROSE, New York Times bestselling author

“Affecting, fast-moving...Most of the novel’s emotional pull steams from blind 12-year-old kidnap victim Jonah Quill, whose tiny hope of survival may hinge on his own considerable wits, [a] gripping life-and-death drama.” — Publishers Weekly

“As in other novels featuring Mallory and her partner, Mallory seems just a little freaky, with a lot of real brain power and a whole lot of attitude toward her underlings. This is twelfth in a series by Carol O’Connell featuring the cool Detective Mallory and, at times, is a highly frightening book that keeps the reader on edge. Mallory shows her extremely smart mind and her absolute dedication to the job. She is one member of the law who can live, no matter what happens, on the very dangerous streets of the big city.” — Suspense Magazine

“Marry the intuition and problem-solving skills of Lincoln Rhyme with the action-figure street smarts and stunts of Jack Reacher, and you’ll come up with someone very close to NYPD Detective Kathy Mallory...A bit of a sociopath herself, she thinks something rather darker is at play (and hey, you have to go some distance to find something darker than a killer who surgically removes the hearts of his prey). As long as O’Connell keeps pumping out crime fiction like this, she will have a faithful reader in me.” — BookPage

“O’Connell’s exceptional novel is complex and heart wrenching. Her attention to detail is meticulous and her depiction of the scheming of multiple characters who attempt to outsmart each other is superb. She rises to the art of unraveling the many surprises without giving anything away. Her use of the background of characters to form their current personalities is genius.” — RT Book Reviews

“Detective Mallory remains one of the most original, and intriguing cops on the planet ... Blind Sight is a classy, classic, riveting read.” — Open Letters Monthly

Praise for Carol O'Connell

“M is for Mallory—Kathy Mallory, bestseller O’Connell’s powerful and powerfully flawed New York Special Crimes Unit detective. M is also for morbid, macabre, and mordant—adjectives that can be applied to the plot, the prose, and the humor of this dazzling 11th novel in the series. Mallory’s bravura performance wreaks justice both inside and outside the legal system.” —Publishers Weekly

“Enthralling . . . Mallory continues to be an enigmatic and fascinating character. Despite an impeccable fashion sense and movie-star good looks, Mallory is as much a feral being as she was when she was first rescued from the streets as a child. Her closest counterpoint in mystery fiction is Lisbeth Salander.” —Oline Cogdill, *Mystery Scene Magazine*

“NYPD Special Crimes Detective Kathy Mallory is one of the most intriguing characters in crime fiction today.” —New York Daily News

“Like all the Mallory novels, this one is a solid police procedural with a twisty plot, and Mallory is a fascinating, rich character. Fans won’t want to miss this.” —Library Journal

“Carol O’Connell is one of my favorite writers.” —New York Times-bestselling author Karin Slaughter

“Before Salander took the world by storm, there was Mallory, the most gloriously original heroine to grace crime fiction’s meanest and darkest streets.” —Sarah Weinman, author of *Troubled Daughters, Twisted Wives*

About the Author

This is Carol O'Connell's twelfth Mallory novel. The others are Mallory's Oracle, The Man Who Cast Two Shadows, Killing Critics, Stone Angel, Shell Game, Crime School, Dead Famous, Winter House, Find Me, The Chalk Girl, and It Happens in the Dark. She is also the author of two stand-alones, Judas Child and Bone By Bone. O'Connell lives in New York City.

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Prologue

The unusual was common here, yet the heads of local people did turn to stare as she walked by. Others, the sightseers, only looked at landmarks for the way life used to be. They had little interest in life ongoing all around them, and so the woman robed in black moved past them. In plain sight. Unseen.

Shops and cafés opened under a blue sky over St. Marks Place, and the first wave of tourists, a dozen or so, gathered round their guide as he spoke of a bygone era when this neighborhood was edgy, dangerous, drugged up—and fun, when the nights had reeked of marijuana for three city blocks. “No need to score reefer in those days,” he said. “You’d just breathe deep and get stoned. It was a party that went on for years.”

“Decades,” said a portly, white-haired New Yorker, who had lived all his long life in an apartment above the family bodega. He turned his back on the tourists to work a squeaky crank on the wall. With a few swift turns, he lowered a striped awning to give his flower stall some shade. The stall was shallow, sized to fit a narrow sidewalk that was choked with sneakers and sandals as the walking tour walked on.

Cars were forced to share the roadbed with two aging rock 'n' rollers on foot. The bodega's proprietor had a good eye for such people. Pilgrims, he called them. They stopped to snap pictures of their shrine, a brownstone that had appeared on an album cover dating back to music on vinyl and songs that were old when those two were young.

Stepping out from the shade of his awning, the elderly man looked up at the sky. Cloudless. How he loved these early summer days when shoplifting children were still jailed in their classrooms. By a movement caught in the corner of one eye, he knew something dark was coming his way, and this, the first shock of the morning, brought out his widest smile.

“Angie!” How many years had gone by? Too many. “So grown up!” Such a liar he was. Angela Quill had not aged a day. She was in her twenties now, but those big gray eyes were the eyes of a child who had yet to grow into them.

When he released the girl from a bear hug, he stepped back to stare at what she wore, what she had become. The veil—even that was no longer common in her trade. But what of the rest? A white wimple framed her face. The wide black robe had enough material to clothe three of her. And there was length enough to hide her feet—so out of place in this age of raised hemlines for holy women.

He plucked out his hearing aid to fiddle the volume and cure a squeal in the works. “What? Say again?” Oh, she was a cloistered nun? He never would have chosen that path for her. Such women were shut away from the world, sealed up behind walls until they died.

Yet here she was—out and about in the city. How could that be? What—

She wanted to buy flowers, but the ones in his stall were all wrapped by the dozen in bouquets. Would he sell her only two roses? She had money for two.

“For you? Here.” He loaded her arms with two dozen red blooms—so happy was he to see her again. “And I won’t take your money.” They talked a while, and his every sentence began with “I remember when—” When she was only ten years old, Angie had been his flower girl, his inspiration for the stall. After an early killing frost, the little girl had taken dead rose bushes from his upstairs window box. Come spring, she had given the fruit of their seedpods to him as tender potted plants. Nowadays, all his plants and cut flowers arrived on a truck. It was not the same—not so charming as a canny child who could bring roses back to him from the dead.

Did he know the time?

“You have to go? So soon?” His attention was called away by a customer—only for a moment. When he turned back to speak with Angie, she was not beside him anymore and nowhere to be seen. How could she leave him with no goodbye? And she had not taken her roses with her. Not all of them. Only two. And a few dollar bills had been left behind. His eyes searched the street. Her long black robe should have made her a standout in this season of barelegged people.

But no. Poof. Gone. And so fast. How had she—

A woman screamed.

Angie? Oh, God, no!

Coming his way was a gaggle of teenage girls with high-pitched shrieks of laughter. So loud. He turned down the volume of his hearing aid. And the scream was blamed upon them. Damn kids. They could stop a man’s heart.

* * *

“Heads up, everybody.” The walking tour came to a halt in front of a vacant store, and the guide pointed to the apartment house on the other side of the street.

The resident of the second floor, an elderly shut-in, thought this man might be pointing up at her, but no, he sang out the name of a long-dead poet who had once lived here.

She wished the tourists would go away. They impeded her view.

The woman in the wheelchair was a creature of the clock, and precisely fifty minutes remained of her customary hour at the window, time enough for a bit of breakfast and her crossword puzzle. Also, she secretly kept company with the old man down on the sidewalk across the street. Though she had not spoken

to him in years, she was that rare old-timer of St. Mark's Place who knew him by name and could recall a day when Albert Costello was a lively, talkative man. Now he was a hermit. However, he did have ritual outings, and so she knew right where to find him every morning at nine o'clock, when she would wheel her chair to the window and there—

Oh! Where was that skinny old fool?

She had looked away from the window to fill in a few blank squares of her puzzle. In only those few seconds, her companion had disappeared, abandoning his post down there by the streetlamp—and long before their shared hour had ended.

Where could he have wandered off to? Albert was as old as she was. He could not move that fast, not even if he had only traveled as far as the door to his apartment building. She scanned the river of tourists on the sidewalk below, but his dear balding head was not there in the swim with them.

Well, that was different. She liked her puzzles, but this one was disturbing.

A woman's scream from the street was less interesting.

* * *

The tour guide faced a clothing store. "That used to be a jazz club. Charlie Parker played there. Greatest sax man who ever lived." His group paused to snap photographs of the famous nightspot that was not there anymore.

And now they had the attention of a young man in blue jeans, who stood on the sidewalk, tying an apron around his waist. The local trade never amounted to much before noon, but he was in need of a smoke before all those freaking tourists descended on the café. Aw, they were turning his way. Too late? Well, still time for a puff, maybe two.

A cigarette dangled from the waiter's mouth as he leaned against the brick wall and struck a match. He watched a child come round a corner, a blind boy tapping a white cane on the pavement—and ditching school. Good for you, kid. Then, with a flick of the wrist, the boy's cane collapsed to a short wand in a conjuror's sleight of hand.

Neat trick. Was the kid even blind? So sure-footed was this little boy that he was either a faker or very much at home on St. Mark's Place.

A woman screamed. But no heads in the approaching tour group were turning to point the way to any trouble. No, these people were focused. Hungry. And screaming that could not be backed up with blood was written off to street noise. Nothing more.

The tour group no longer blocked his view of the—

The blind boy had disappeared. One second he was there—then gone. He must have ducked into a doorway. But the illusion of a vanishing act remained with the waiter as yet another neat trick.

* * *

Incredibly, the troop of sightseers had witnessed nothing, every pair of eyes turned elsewhere as they spilled into the narrow street and crossed over.

The lady from Bora Bora watched them file into the café. Though she was hungry, breakfast could wait until her son arrived. She looked to the west, the direction of his university. No sign of him. Where was her student prince? She spoke Tahitian, French and a smattering of Japanese, but she had no words that Americans might understand. And so, for the past week, her eldest child had been her guide through this part of the world. He was late to join her for a last meal and a kiss goodbye before she must leave for the airport.

She did not mind the wait. Her homeland in the South Pacific was a place of great beauty and deep peace, but this other island, Manhattan, was an intoxicating display of action—theater of the street. Without her son to translate, some acts would always be inexplicable. And the most recent one had been over in a snatch of seconds when two people had disappeared.

At the end of her long journey home, she would speak of the drama that had unfolded on the sidewalk. She would retell it as a fabulous fable for her youngest child, a little boy who loved nothing better than a scary story. “Flying down the street,” she would say to him, “a running woman’s long black robe became dark wings spread upon the wind.”

In a fury, the Bird Woman of St. Mark’s Place had attacked a muscular man and ridden his back—and that part was true. “Claws dug in. Her black wings flapping. His arms flailing.” The tense battle of man and giant bird had just begun when they vanished—in seconds—disappearing behind a brief curtain drawn in the form of a sightseers passing by, and so it seemed that Bird Woman had flown up and away with her prey clutched in talons.

Though, in truth, at the sound of the great bird’s victory scream, the lady from Bora Bora had never turned her eyes to the sky. The scream had not come from up there. But, for the sake of the story, she would only rely on the magical logic of the moment.

Chapter 1

If they knew why he had come here, all these men would turn him away.

The odyssey had begun in the morning on St. Mark’s Place, not half a mile from this SoHo police station, and now it was night. A bank of tall grimy windows worked poorly as mirrors, reflecting his white hair and face, but not his black cassock, and so Father Brenner’s head appeared to float across the squad

room—slowly—though his mission here was urgent.

Long fluorescent tubes of light spanned the high ceiling, some of them twitchy, blinking off and on with a nervous sputter, and telephones glowed with red lights, the tiny alarms of those left hanging on the line. Half the desks were occupied by tired detectives drinking coffee, tapping keyboards and talking among themselves.

All conversation stopped.

Heads lifted here and there to note his passage, and one man winced when it was apparent that the elderly priest was heading for Kathy Mallory's desk.

Understood.

Father Brenner reminded himself to address her as Detective Mallory, having lost the right to any familiarity when she was a child in his parish school, enrolled there by her foster mother, Helen Markowitz. That good woman had suspected that Kathy was born a Catholic, but suspicion was all that Helen and her husband ever had to work with. The little girl had told them nothing useful, not even her right age. So she might have been ten years old upon that first meeting in his office, but certainly not eleven, the age on her application.

The child had been presented to him in the guise of a small Botticelli angel. Backlit by sunlight that day, her blond curls had gleamed like a dammed halo.

Here, he paused in his recollection and his steps.

Yes, damned was a fitting word for that early impression. A second look at her had pretty much killed his angel analogy. The long slants of her eyes held a shade of green not found in nature, not God's work. Even then, long before she would grow up to carry a gun, he had intuited that she was dangerous. Another early indicator was a teaching nun, who had been left with a rather bad limp to mark the close of Kathy's final semester.

The priest still carried guilt for his blindness to Sister Ursula's eccentricity. No, call it cruelty. Crazy old woman.

Upon his first visit to this police station, he had brought Inspector Markowitz's foster child along to explain the plaster cast on her wrist—and the nun in the hospital. The meeting had not gone well. Guided by a schoolgirl code of Thou shalt not rat, Kathy had refused to confirm Sister Ursula's assault on her. Honoring the child's resolve, the inspector had called it a breakeven day, "My kid's broken wrist for the nun's mangled leg." But outside of Kathy's hearing, Louis Markowitz had offered the priest the angry choice of "Put that nun in a bughouse, or put her down like a dog. Pick one!"

Father Brenner had selected the bughouse option.

Tonight, his eyeglasses sweated down the bridge of his nose. It was taking him such a long time to cross this room and meet with the grownup Kathy Mallory; he was that anxious to see her again. He had spoken with her commanding officer in passing at the downstairs door, and Lieutenant Coffey had waived the protocol of a visitor's badge and pointed the way up the staircase to the Special Crimes Unit. And so the priest might believe that he was coming upon this young woman unannounced—catching her unawares.

Foolish idea? Oh, yes.

As a child, she had given him the eerie sense that her vision extended to the back of her head—and spookier

still—to the inside of his head. He kept this illusion saved away with others in his mythology of her, a book of many pages.

Not a holy book.

So far, the young detective in blue jeans appeared normal enough, though rather well-dressed for a civil servant. As a boy, he had worked in his father's tailor shop, and he well knew the quality of the wonderful linen blazer draped on the back of her chair. So good was his sartorial eye, he could even attest to her T-shirt's fine grade of silk.

Kathy Mallory's eyes were focused on the glowing screen of a computer, and the light of a desk lamp gave her another halo, but the priest was long past that deception. As he approached, she did not turn to him in any natural fashion. The golden head swiveled—machinelike—and she did not look up to meet his eyes. No recognition at all. He might well be a piece of furniture with a clerical collar. This was an old, cold quirk of hers, one that used to unhinge him with the thought that she was not quite like the other children, not human, no heart, no pulse.

In a more worldly sense, she was not much changed in her mid-twenties. The high cheekbones were more pronounced, but she was otherwise a taller replica of the child with the cream-white skin and cupid's bow lips. He often wondered if that lovely face had been the chief complaint of Sister Ursula, the ugly antithesis of Kathy. Yes, that would have set the old woman off. The nun would have regarded the infliction of pain as tempering temptations of the flesh, punishing a little girl for the crime of—

“Sit down, Father Brenner.” Kathy Mallory's half-smile welcomed him to hell. It was a given that, if she seemed at all happy to see him, it was only because she liked the diversion of toying with his soul—as if she had that power over him.

Well . . . did she not? Obediently, he settled into the wooden chair beside her desk.

“What brings you out tonight?” Her silken voice gave him no clue of inflection. Her red fingernails were more telling, drumming the desktop, prompting him to get on with his reason for bothering her.

He might begin with the news that her old nemesis, Sister Ursula, had died, but before he could open his mouth, she read his mind to say, “I'm sorry for your loss.” Her condolences on the dead nun were delivered with an expression of pure pleasure, the way a cat might smile with a mouse in her teeth—at the moment before she bit down hard to break the creature's back. No mercy, no forgiveness.

No surprise there.

“I've come about another nun,” he said. “A young one, close to your age. I'm afraid for her.” No sympathy was expected on this account. He could only hope to intrigue. “Sister Michael disappeared yesterday. She's already been reported to Missing Persons. They said they'd look into it. . . . I know what that means.” Goodbye, Sister, and best of luck to you. “But I believe she was kidnapped.”

“So there's a ransom demand.” Hardly intrigued, the detective turned back to the screen of her laptop, a sign of dismissal even before she said, “Go talk to Major Case. They handle that. We do homicides here.”

And it would take more than one homicide to interest her. Over the years spent following her career with the NYPD, he had learned that the Special Crimes Unit was best known for cases with a high body count, the bloodiest carnage in New York City.

“Ransom?” He scratched his head in a calculated show of vagueness. “Well, I don’t know about that.”

“No note? No phone call?” She faced him again, eyes narrowed. “Then why would you think it’s a kidnapping?” Clearly, she did not believe him.

Good. That should hold her attention. Oh, just the chance to catch him in a lie, to make him twist and squirm—how she would love that. “This is all I know,” he said. “Sister Michael was on the way to visit her mother on St. Marks Place. She started out in the morning, but never got there. That was yesterday. And we both know that Missing Persons is not out looking for her.”

“They’re swamped with runaways.” Her eyes closed in the slow blink of a contented cat, and he knew he had her now, for she was playing harmless when she tossed off the afterthought that, “People are always walking away from their old lives.”

“If she wanted to leave her order, she would’ve worn street clothes, not this.” He set a snapshot on the desk. It was a bit damp from his hand. He had carried it all through this day into night. It pictured a young woman in the long robe and veil of a cloistered nun. “And I know she bought two red roses in her mother’s neighborhood. I talked to the man who sold—” Oh, no, he was boring her. Well, onto the bit he had saved for last. “I can promise you that Sister Michael’s mother does not have the mayor’s ear . . . but that man knew about the disappearance before the Missing Persons report was filed.”

He thought she might like that part, but it was hard to tell. She was tensing, as if wound by a spring and set to—

She leaned far forward. And, whip-lash fast, he sat well back.

“What else did you hold out on Missing Persons? They’re not idiots over there. If you’d told them—”

“I wasn’t the one who made that report. . . . I don’t even know Sister Michael.”

Her eyes flickered. A Eureka moment?

“So the church is cop-shopping,” she said. “Reaching out for a detective who’ll play nice with the ugly parts. . . . That’s why they picked you? Because they think we had a warm, cozy relationship when I was a kid?”

A good guess in some respects.

“I did go to Major Case,” he said. “Their detective sent me away after five minutes. I had no proof of kidnapping. That’s what he told—”

“You think there is proof. You think I can get it for you. So there was a ransom demand.” Her tone accused him of lying. Fair warning. It was confession time at the police station. “Where’d you get your information, Father? I know Mayor Polk won’t play golf with any priest lower than a bishop. Who told you he already knew about—”

“I can’t give you a name.”

“You can!” Her fist hit the desk as punctuation. “Nobody sent you here under the Seal of the Confessional.” Her sudden expression of anger fell away in the flip of a switch to one of resignation, which must be an equally false mask. “All right, just tell me what church politician talks to the city politicians. Does that make it less like ratting out another priest?”

Yes, that would do. “Father DuPont is on the cardinal’s staff. He’d be the one to—”

“And what’s the nun’s name?” She turned away from him to face her computer.

“I told you. Sister—”

“Her real name.”

Not the saint’s name taken with her final vows. The archangel had been a fierce choice for a nun—a name that was the battle cry of the good angles in the War of Heaven. “In her former life, she was known as Angela Quill.”

The detective tapped her keyboard. “So this woman disappears, and you jump to the conclusion of . . . what? A satanic nun collector?” She tilted her head to one side, her face a parody of innocence when she asked, “Why is that?”

“Hey, Mallory.” A man with hooded eyes slouched up to the desk. His dark hair was silvered with enough gray to make him at least twice her age. Raising one hand, he warded off her response. “I know. Half a day shot. I went home for lunch and walked in on a stickup. Took me forever to get through the booking.” He turned an affable smile on the priest. “I live over a bar. The owner’s my landlord. If I’d let the perp walk outta there with the cash, my rent would’ve gone up.” The man sloughed off his wrinkled suit jacket and sat down at the desk that faced and adjoined Kathy Mallory’s. The garment slid from his lap to the floor, and he left it there.

Not a tidy man.

Though the cheap suit did have an odor of spot remover, those shoes had not been polished in recent decades. This wardrobe-challenged detective introduced himself as Riker. “I’m her partner. What can we do for you, Padre?”

Not a Catholic.

Father Brenner pulled a folded sheet of paper from his cassock pocket. The bold type above the nun’s grainy portrait asked, HAVE YOU SEEN HER? This was his mission statement at a glance, and he handed it to the man. “That’s my last one. I’ve been taping them up in store windows.” Sister Michael’s photograph was, more accurately, a picture of what she wore. Her face was the smallest element in the frame, and not what he had counted upon to stand out in the memory of the public. But her long robe and veil would be a rare sight on city streets.

“A dress-code nun,” said Riker. “Wearing that getup of hers must be hell in this heat. Is she from the Brooklyn convent?”

“No, she’s from the Monastery of St. Bernardine. It’s about sixty miles upstate. The nuns have a website and a tractor, but otherwise, their traditions are centuries old. We have no pictures of Sister Michael in other clothes, and no family members to help with—”

“But her mother’s alive.” Kathy Mallory smiled to say that she had caught him in another lie, though he had yet to make even one false statement. “You told me the nun was on the way to visit her—”

“The mother only had the same photo I used for my poster. I called on the woman this morning.”

Detective Riker held the nun’s poster at arm’s length, the distance for a man who ought to wear bifocals.

Brows knit together, eyes squinting, he asked, “Is that face—” The man looked to his partner as if she might have an answer to that half a question.

And she did. As her laptop was angled toward Riker, Father Brenner saw the full-screen display of Sister Michael clad in a torn red camisole that hung from one bruised shoulder by a flimsy string. The makeup was garish. The dark hair was spiked and streaked with purple dye.

It was an old police mug shot.

Kathy Mallory raised her eyebrows, as if only mildly curious. “One of your more interesting nuns?”

Detective Riker stared at the screen image that gave up the name in bold capital letters. “Quill!” He looked down at the poster and tapped the date of the nun’s disappearance. “Two Quills go missing on the same day?”

* * *

Almost there.

Detective Riker had cadged a ride out of SoHo in the backseat of a patrol car, and now he rolled north past the skyscrapers of Midtown, heading for the Upper East Side, the heart of the search for a kidnapped schoolboy.

How long had his partner intended to toy with Father Brenner before mentioning Jonah, the other missing Quill? Riker wasted no pity on the priest. That old man had known what he was dealing with before he walked in the door of Special Crimes.

Kathy Mallory was also—special.

As the car rounded a corner, he saw a familiar face on the street and leaned toward the patrolmen in the front seat. “Guys? I’m gettin’ out here.”

The driver pulled to the curb half a block from this precinct’s station house, and Riker stepped out on the sidewalk to shake hands with an old friend, a sergeant like himself, but not in the Detective Bureau. Murray was still in uniform and now in charge of the officers canvassing Jonah Quill’s neighborhood.

After their exchange of Good to see your ugly face and What’s up, Riker was told why the kidnap story had not been fed to reporters. “The kid’s uncle is loaded with money,” said Murray. So, on good odds of a ransom demand, the crime had not gone public. And there were no worries about leaks to the press corps. The police commissioner had menaced news outlets all over town with naked threats to people’s private parts, a time-honored practice officially known as media cooperation.

Riker slung his suit jacket over one arm as he walked down East Sixty-seventh Street alongside Sergeant Murray. They passed by a woman with a Great Dane on a leash, and the detective had to wonder how large the lady’s apartment might be to accommodate a dog the size of a pony. How many acres of floor space? Downtown, south of Houston Street, Riker was considered a social climber because his bathtub was not in the kitchen.

He gave the nun's poster to Murray as they entered the local police station, a landmark building from the late 1800s. Though Riker's own station house was also more than a century old, it was less grand. This one, disguised as an oversized townhouse, had been built to blend into a patch of the 19th Precinct that was filthy with millionaires. But the neighborhood had no flavor, no music. There might be some history to it; the detective did not know or care. No rockers had ever sung songs about this part of town, and that said it all for Riker.

Sergeant Murray, not so vain as the SoHo detective, put on his bifocals, the better to study the small face on the poster. "I'll be damned. Nobody told us about any nun. . . . She looks just like Jonah." He led Riker up the stairs to the second floor, saying over one shoulder, "Tell you what we got. Cops downtown reported sightings of a blind kid tapping his way up a street with a white cane. They can place him in the East Village that morning. But we got other sightings in the Bronx and Queens."

"The East Village fits with Sister Michael," said Riker. "We know she bought flowers on St. Mark's Place around nine that morning."

"Well, this'll get us some leads." Sergeant Murray held up the poster for a second look. "What's up with those dicks at Missing Persons? We should've had a copy of this. The nun's even got the kid's smile."

"Shit happens."

The sergeant nodded to say, Amen, brother, and then he stopped by a closed door at the tops of the stairs. "We keep him in here."

The door opened by a few inches to give Riker a covert look at a civilian half his age, who sat at the far end of a conference table that was littered with paper cups and take-out cartons, pens and yellow pads. The young man's head was bowed, and his hands were clenched together in a white-knuckle prayer.

Murray kept his voice low, saying, "That's the kid's uncle, Harold Quill. He won't go home. Don't expect much, okay? The guy's punchy. No sleep since his nephew disappeared."

The lean, dark-haired Quill sported a stubble of beard, and the wrinkles in his expensive suit were also a few days in the making. When the detective and the sergeant entered the room, the man looked up with the eyes of the boy and the nun, large and gray and ringed with black lashes, but his had a vacant look of no one home. His skin was bloodless. And a puff of air might push him over, not that he would notice.

Riker had seen this before—what was left of a man when a child went missing.

After Sergeant Murray made the introductions, the detective sat down beside the distraught uncle. "So . . . you got a family connection to Angela Quill. Is that right?"

No response? Was this guy debating whether or not he should answer that simple question without legal advice? Rich people—could they even answer a damn phone without a lawyer?

"Angie's my sister," said Harold Quill. "She's a—"

"A nun, yeah. Was she meeting up with your nephew yesterday morning?"

"No! Why would you—" Quill covered his face with both hands, as if that could make a cop disappear, and he shook his head. "I drove Jonah to school. . . . He should've been in class."

"The nun's gone missing, too. My partner's downtown talkin' to your mother. Do you—"

“No!” Harold Quill grabbed Riker’s arm, and the detective pretended not to notice that this man’s fingernails were digging into him. “Promise me,” said Quill, “promise you won’t tell my mother where I live!”

* * *

Detective Mallory was Mrs. Quill’s only visitor from the NYPD. Evidently, her son had failed to tell police that his kidnapped nephew had a grandmother on the Lower East Side. Less surprising, no one had even telephoned for a statement on the disappearance of her daughter, the nun. Most surprising? This woman had taken the dwindling of her family members quite well—as if one or two of them might vanish on a typical day.

“I called the prioress to tell her what I thought of my daughter for standing me up.” In a lower voice, the mother muttered, “That bitch. That whore.”

And would the nice detective like some tea?

Statuettes of saints cluttered every surface in this stuffy parlor that stank of scented, votive candles, the odor of cinnamon warring with rosemary and lavender. All the walls were lined with portraits of Jesus: a laughing Christ and a weeping one, but predominantly bloody, suffering Christs nailed up by hand and foot, and these images had set the tone of the interview with Mrs. Quill, whose mouth was forever frozen in the downturned arc of the righteous, whose eyes were way too wide and laser bright with the light of the Lord.

Mallory sat on the sofa, flipping through the family photograph album. Useless. Most of the faces pictured here had been scratched out, though not all of these erasures were done with the same tool. Some cuts were sharper than others. Beside her sat the scrawny matriarch of the family, dressed in a prim white nightgown. The loudmouthed crone guided the detective, page by page. And so Mallory discovered that images of the husband had been the first mutilations.

“May he rot in hell! He left me with three damn kids.”

Next in the order of abandonment came the scratched-out face of a blond daughter.

“Gabriel. Gabby, we called her. She was fifteen when that picture was taken. That’s when she ran away from me. A year later, she died giving birth to a bastard.” Mrs. Quill said this with great satisfaction, as if that death might have been payback for a child born out of wedlock. The woman lowered her voice and leaned closer to share another happy confidence. “Gabby’s son was born blind.”

Even a more seasoned detective would have flinched. Mallory only looked down at one more photo of a faceless girl, and this one had dark hair.

“Oh, that’s my Angie, the other goddamn whore.” Mrs. Quill reached out one boney hand to turn to the next page, and there was the only unscarred picture of this daughter, a recent addition that had yet to be pasted in with album corners. Sister Michael was posed in the robes of a nun. “She redeemed herself . . . with the church.” Sarcasm suggested that the nun had yet to be redeemed here at home.

Every picture of Mrs. Quill’s son, Harold, had the face scratched out in the year he had sued her for custody of his nephew, Gabby’s blind child. “Poor little Jonah. They stole him from me—Harry and that bitch social worker. By now, the boy’s drowning in sin.” A photograph of this child as a toddler, who had yet to commit

any known sin against his grandmother, had survived the knife cuts of omission from the family.

Given more than a nodding acquaintance with Crazy, Mallory had to ask how this woman fancied chances for the survival of Sister Michael and Jonah. “Are they dead or alive?”

“Dead!” This firm vote revealed no guilt, but perhaps the opinion that a nun and a little boy could deserve to lose their lives. Then Mrs. Quill added, “Dead and gone to God,” a slightly better outcome, though offered up with less enthusiasm.

* * *

The walls were brick. The door was metal. The grownups were dead.

Jonah had stepped on their flung-out arms and legs while mapping this chilly room that was fifteen steps square. A queasy horror. And now the stink of them was dulled by clogs of snot brought on by the boy’s crying. He had found his aunt among the corpses.

By touch, he had recognized a long robe and veil, but he knew it was Aunt Angie by the smallest finger of her right hand, broken in her childhood and crooked out at the knuckle. Jonah had held this hand so many times. He could never mistake it for any other.

She had gone away when he was seven years old. For five years, he had waited for her in the fantasy of *She Comes Back*—and here she was.

He kissed her crooked finger.

High on the wall and beyond his reach, the loud motor started up again with the death rattle of an old machine, its parts clacking, broken or breaking down, but still churning out more blasts of cold air. Shivering, Jonah laid his body down beside his aunt. She gave him comfort—and warmth. Her wide robe was generous enough to cover him, too. “Thank you.”

Pieces of a day were missing. Or was it two days? His internal clock was broken. There was a rumble in his stomach, but the thought of food made him want to puke. Was his brain busted, too? Dumbed down? Only now he thought to wonder what had happened to him—to her.

How could she be dead?

Aunt Angie knew how to fight. On her way out of his life, she had taught him that fingernails could draw blood, thumbs could gouge out eyes, and a kick to the balls could put a man in a world of hurt. And then she had walked out the door to catch a bus to God’s house.

Had she known then what was coming—who was coming?

Her killer would never suspect him until it was too late. He could walk right up to that sick bastard and play helpless—just a kid, right?—and then nail him. Kill him? Yes! Beneath the blanket of the shared robe, Jonah’s fists made one-two punches. No fear. Aunt Angie was with him, keeping him warm, teaching him how to draw blood and bring on pain. His aunt’s side of this conversation was made up from saved-away memories of her, the sound of her, but all the words had the ring of true things. He knew what she would say

to every—

The air conditioner shut down. Now a new sound. Metal on metal. A squeak to a door hinge. And the dead woman's voice inside his head screamed, That's him!

The boy shook off the robe and sat up.

Footsteps. Heavy ones. Aunt Angie sang out, Get ready!

Jonah was shaking and shot through with freaking cold, heart-a-banging panic.

The footsteps stopped a few paces into the room. Jonah rocked his body like a toddler with a wooden horse between his legs. The hard-soled shoes were crossing the floor, coming for him. They were here! Now the smell of cigarette breath. So close. Puffs of stinky air on his face.

Close enough! yelled Aunt Angie.

A man's deeper voice, a real one, said, "You can't see."

Jonah, get him!

Sorry, so sorry, but he could not do that. He was crazy scared. A small bottle of sloshing liquid was pressed into his hands—a reward for getting the rules right in a world where twelve-year-old boys were always outmatched by grown men. Sorry.

The bottled water tasted odd. No matter. So thirsty. Jonah drank it, gulped it down. All gone now. His rocking slowed—and stopped. His fear ebbed away, dulling down to nothing. Sleep was creeping up on him.

Behind him was the man's hard-sole step. Stepping over the other bodies? Light plops. Dull scrapes. A quick shuffle of shoes. The door opened and closed, shoes leaving and coming back again—and again. More steps and shuffles, rustles and—what?

No! Jonah shook his head, shaking off a mind-muddling fog.

He reached for Aunt Angie's hand. No, no, no—she was sliding away, leaving him. Her body was dragged across the floor faster than he could crawl after her. Not fair! He rose up on his knees, as much of a stand as he could manage, and his hands balled into fists. "Give her back!"

The door went BANG!

And the boy fell, toppling to one side. Sleep came on so fast. He never felt the pain of hard ground rushing up to meet him with a knock to the head that said, Goodnight!

Chapter 2

The trees of Carl Schurz Park gave cover to Gracie Mansion, the official residence of the mayor. In the small hours of the morning, an alarm had sounded, and now this eighteenth-century landmark and its adjoining wing were surrounded by sheets of plastic tied off on ten-foot poles. Above this curtain, only the upper half of the extension building could be seen by civilians on East End Avenue. They saw nothing of the more secluded yellow mansion that overlooked the channel waters of Hell Gate—and the corpses stacked up on the lawn.

Members of the hazmat team were visible through the cloudy plastic as they moved about in helmets and bulky white suits that were sealed to protect them against deadly gasses and flesh-eating viruses or come what may.

On the broad sidewalk across the street, their audience was sporting Sunday-best T-shirts, shorts and summer dresses. The atmosphere turned festive as the crowd applauded the first sighting of bright-colored umbrellas attached to rolling carts. Food vendors had turned out to cater this new threat to public health and safety. Men in aprons hawked their wares along the roadbed, first servicing the front lines. Then hungry buyers at the rear sent their money forward, hand-to-hand, and bags of bagels and coffee were handed back to them.

Men and women in dark suits held up the IDs of Homeland Security, and they yelled at the civilians, ordering them to move on. Predictably, these federal agents were ignored. The menace implied by moon suits had scared off out-of-towners, but not blasé natives who always formed a crowd for the prospect of sudden death in New York City. And, dammit, it was time for brunch.

Behind the backs of the shouting agents, a cadre of uniformed police officers stood in a line down the center of the avenue, and they all wore smirks of *We told you so, you stupid bastards*. The NYPD knew how to do crowd control. And, clearly, the federal government did not.

Some civilians with curb-side views sat on canvas camp stools sold from a cart with merchandise that included paper fans and sun visors. Most of the crowd remained standing, growing restless as they watched the slow, blurry movements of the hazmat team. New York attitude was in the air, and it demanded, *Hey, let's get on with the show!*

* * *

Two detectives stood behind the gawkers. One wore an out-of-date suit that spoke well of him as a civil servant who lived within his means, though, truth be told, Riker hated shopping and had let it slide for years.

He gave his partner a gallant wave that said, *Ladies first*, so he could use tall Mallory as a wedge to move through this tightly packed mob. People tended to get out of her way, and not because they respected the badge or her tailored threads—or the running shoes that cost more than Riker's entire closet, shoes thrown in. The whole package said that she was somebody, but the Mallory effect on crowds was more than that. When she wanted to jangle a civilian—like right now—she dropped every pretense of being human and walked toward the poor bastard as if she meant to walk right through him, and this was all that was needed to inspire that man's wary backward dance.

Just a hint of crazy got a world of respect in this town, though there were detectives in the Special Crimes Unit who suspected that Kathy Mallory was not hinting. She might be the real deal. Riker believed she knew this and encouraged it in the same way that the clothes on her back flaunted the idea of a cop who might be dirty.

She liked her games. She played them well.

When they reached the street, Riker ignored the government suits—so as not to lose face with the cops on the line. He spoke to the uniform with the sergeant's stripe, "What's up, Murray? You got a body count?"

“Yeah, I seen four of ’em in there.” The sergeant glanced at officers to his left and right, indicating that this was not a good time to thank him for a tip on a dead nun. “The security cameras are useless—blacked out with paintballs. But I know the perp was wearing NYPD blue last night. On the other side of the park, we found a cop knocked out cold and stripped down to his skivvies.”

Mallory was distracted by an argument half a block away. It looked to be one-sided, no fists in play yet, but getting there. Riker also watched this scene as a government agent, red in the face, rose off the balls of his feet, trying so hard to be taller. The fed was outsize by the man who set a Gladstone bag down on the sidewalk at his booted feet. Chief Medical Examiner Edward Slope ripped off his protective helmet and gloves. The doctor’s anger was more dignified—and more effective. The flat of one raised hand silenced the younger, shorter man from Homeland Security. Now it was Dr. Slope’s turn to vent, and the federal agent came down from his tiptoes.

“A scam.” Without hearing one clear word, Mallory had the gist of the ME’s complaint. “Those moon suits are just for show, right?”

“That’s my guess,” said Sergeant Murray. “What we got in there is weird, but it’s got shit to do with germs or poison gas. I figure the mayor wanted to keep people outta the park . . . on a Sunday. Well, forget that.” With a nod toward the plastic curtain, he said, “So one of those clowns in there called out the hazmat team. Figured that’d scare ’em off.” He turned back to the bagel-noshing sidewalk crowd. “Do they look scared to you?”

Since diplomacy was not his partner’s forte, Riker walked down the street to join the kiddy agent in charge of false alarms and circuses. The detective offered this youngster the carrot of being addressed as a grownup. “Look, pal, I know you got jerked around today, but don’t go off on anybody else, okay? We need some leverage here. Just pack up the moon suits and go.”

“Somebody’s gotta pay for dragging out the whole damn—”

“Me and my partner, we can make that happen. We can make the pack of ’em wish they’d never screwed with you.” In the hierarchy of New York City, this was a fairy tale, but the young agent seemed to like the story.

BLIND SIGHT (A MALLORY NOVEL) BY CAROL O'CONNELL PDF

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BLIND SIGHT (A MALLORY NOVEL) BY CAROL O'CONNELL PDF

The extraordinary new Mallory novel from one of the most acclaimed crime writers in America.

A blind child and a Catholic nun disappear from a city sidewalk in plain sight of onlookers. There, then gone—vanished in seconds. Those who witnessed the event still cannot believe it happened.

It was all too real. Detective Kathy Mallory and the NYPD's Special Crimes Unit enter the investigation when the nun's body is found with three other corpses in varying stages of decomposition left on the lawn of Gracie Mansion, home to the mayor of New York City. Sister Michael was the last to die. The child, Jonah Quill, is still missing.

Like Jonah, the police are blind. Unknown to them, he is with a stone killer, and though he has unexpected resources of his own, his would-be saviors have no suspect, no useful evidence, and no clue — except for Detective Mallory's suspicions of things not said and her penchant for getting to the truth beneath lies. Behind her back, the squad's name for her is Mallory the Machine, yet she has a dark understanding of what it is to be human. A child is waiting, time is running out, and atop her list of liars is the mayor himself...and a theory of the crimes in which no sane cop could believe.

- Sales Rank: #196504 in Books
- Brand: Carol O Connell
- Published on: 2016-09-20
- Released on: 2016-09-20
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.31" h x 1.25" w x 6.25" l, .0 pounds
- Binding: Hardcover
- 400 pages

Features

- Blind Sight Kathleen Mallory Novels Hardcover

Review

Praise for Blind Sight

“Carol O'Connell's latest novel featuring Special Crimes Unit Detective Kathy Mallory has an almost Dickensian feel. In her own way, O'Connell is as quirky and elusive as Mallory. [F]or those readers looking to escape the usual police procedurals, she's the ticket.” — Chicago Tribune

“O'Connell's 12th Mallory novel has all of her trademarks: a twisty puzzle, page-turning suspense, and a dark and complex city of corruption. Above all is the cool, scary Mallory, who sees through the smokescreen of civility to the violence within. As one character says, ‘Vengeance, thy name is Mallory.’...A solid entry -- The mystery is satisfyingly complex, and the pace makes it hard to put down.” — Library Journal

“Kathy Mallory's twelfth outing showcases the unparalleled characterization and powerful backstory that

have made this a bar-raising hard-boiled series ... Mallory's street-sharpened tactics are as riveting as ever."
— Booklist, starred review

"As in previous novels, Mallory's quirky personality shows "just a hint of crazy," and sometimes, to unnerve people, she drops "every pretense of being human." She's an entertaining, slightly over-the-top protagonist with brains and attitude. Colorful and appealing (or appalling) characters make this one a winner for crime-fic fans." — Kirkus, starred review

"Both slickly cool and hot to the touch, Carol O'Connell's *Blind Sight* is a master class in suspense. As her detective hero, the inscrutable and fascinating Mallory, plunges into darker and darker terrain, we feel lucky—thrilled—to be along for the ride."
—New York Times-bestselling author MEGAN ABBOTT

"Do I really need to say anything other than Mallory is back? And she's darker, more sly and disturbing than ever. Carol O'Connell is at her finest in this addictive, riveting, stylish, powerful psychological thriller. Once again, she's raised the bar for crime fiction."
— M. J. ROSE, New York Times bestselling author

"Affecting, fast-moving...Most of the novel's emotional pull steams from blind 12-year-old kidnap victim Jonah Quill, whose tiny hope of survival may hinge on his own considerable wits, [a] gripping life-and-death drama." — Publishers Weekly

"As in other novels featuring Mallory and her partner, Mallory seems just a little freaky, with a lot of real brain power and a whole lot of attitude toward her underlings. This is twelfth in a series by Carol O'Connell featuring the cool Detective Mallory and, at times, is a highly frightening book that keeps the reader on edge. Mallory shows her extremely smart mind and her absolute dedication to the job. She is one member of the law who can live, no matter what happens, on the very dangerous streets of the big city." — Suspense Magazine

"Marry the intuition and problem-solving skills of Lincoln Rhyme with the action-figure street smarts and stunts of Jack Reacher, and you'll come up with someone very close to NYPD Detective Kathy Mallory...A bit of a sociopath herself, she thinks something rather darker is at play (and hey, you have to go some distance to find something darker than a killer who surgically removes the hearts of his prey). As long as O'Connell keeps pumping out crime fiction like this, she will have a faithful reader in me." — BookPage

"O'Connell's exceptional novel is complex and heart wrenching. Her attention to detail is meticulous and her depiction of the scheming of multiple characters who attempt to outsmart each other is superb. She rises to the art of unraveling the many surprises without giving anything away. Her use of the background of characters to form their current personalities is genius." — RT Book Reviews

"Detective Mallory remains one of the most original, and intriguing cops on the planet ... *Blind Sight* is a classy, classic, riveting read." — Open Letters Monthly

Praise for Carol O'Connell

"M is for Mallory—Kathy Mallory, bestseller O'Connell's powerful and powerfully flawed New York Special Crimes Unit detective. M is also for morbid, macabre, and mordant—adjectives that can be applied to the plot, the prose, and the humor of this dazzling 11th novel in the series. Mallory's bravura performance wreaks justice both inside and outside the legal system." —Publishers Weekly

“Enthralling . . . Mallory continues to be an enigmatic and fascinating character. Despite an impeccable fashion sense and movie-star good looks, Mallory is as much a feral being as she was when she was first rescued from the streets as a child. Her closest counterpoint in mystery fiction is Lisbeth Salander.” —Oline Cogdill, *Mystery Scene Magazine*

“NYPD Special Crimes Detective Kathy Mallory is one of the most intriguing characters in crime fiction today.” —*New York Daily News*

“Like all the Mallory novels, this one is a solid police procedural with a twisty plot, and Mallory is a fascinating, rich character. Fans won’t want to miss this.” —*Library Journal*

“Carol O’Connell is one of my favorite writers.” —*New York Times*-bestselling author Karin Slaughter

“Before Salander took the world by storm, there was Mallory, the most gloriously original heroine to grace crime fiction’s meanest and darkest streets.” —Sarah Weinman, author of *Troubled Daughters, Twisted Wives*

About the Author

This is Carol O’Connell’s twelfth Mallory novel. The others are *Mallory’s Oracle*, *The Man Who Cast Two Shadows*, *Killing Critics*, *Stone Angel*, *Shell Game*, *Crime School*, *Dead Famous*, *Winter House*, *Find Me*, *The Chalk Girl*, and *It Happens in the Dark*. She is also the author of two stand-alones, *Judas Child* and *Bone By Bone*. O’Connell lives in New York City.

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Prologue

The unusual was common here, yet the heads of local people did turn to stare as she walked by. Others, the sightseers, only looked at landmarks for the way life used to be. They had little interest in life ongoing all around them, and so the woman robed in black moved past them. In plain sight. Unseen.

Shops and cafés opened under a blue sky over St. Marks Place, and the first wave of tourists, a dozen or so, gathered round their guide as he spoke of a bygone era when this neighborhood was edgy, dangerous, drugged up—and fun, when the nights had reeked of marijuana for three city blocks. “No need to score reefer in those days,” he said. “You’d just breathe deep and get stoned. It was a party that went on for years.”

“Decades,” said a portly, white-haired New Yorker, who had lived all his long life in an apartment above the family bodega. He turned his back on the tourists to work a squeaky crank on the wall. With a few swift turns, he lowered a striped awning to give his flower stall some shade. The stall was shallow, sized to fit a narrow sidewalk that was choked with sneakers and sandals as the walking tour walked on.

Cars were forced to share the roadbed with two aging rock ’n’ rollers on foot. The bodega’s proprietor had a

good eye for such people. Pilgrims, he called them. They stopped to snap pictures of their shrine, a brownstone that had appeared on an album cover dating back to music on vinyl and songs that were old when those two were young.

Stepping out from the shade of his awning, the elderly man looked up at the sky. Cloudless. How he loved these early summer days when shoplifting children were still jailed in their classrooms. By a movement caught in the corner of one eye, he knew something dark was coming his way, and this, the first shock of the morning, brought out his widest smile.

“Angie!” How many years had gone by? Too many. “So grown up!” Such a liar he was. Angela Quill had not aged a day. She was in her twenties now, but those big gray eyes were the eyes of a child who had yet to grow into them.

When he released the girl from a bear hug, he stepped back to stare at what she wore, what she had become. The veil—even that was no longer common in her trade. But what of the rest? A white wimple framed her face. The wide black robe had enough material to clothe three of her. And there was length enough to hide her feet—so out of place in this age of raised hemlines for holy women.

He plucked out his hearing aid to fiddle the volume and cure a squeal in the works. “What? Say again?” Oh, she was a cloistered nun? He never would have chosen that path for her. Such women were shut away from the world, sealed up behind walls until they died.

Yet here she was—out and about in the city. How could that be? What—

She wanted to buy flowers, but the ones in his stall were all wrapped by the dozen in bouquets. Would he sell her only two roses? She had money for two.

“For you? Here.” He loaded her arms with two dozen red blooms—so happy was he to see her again. “And I won’t take your money.” They talked a while, and his every sentence began with “I remember when—” When she was only ten years old, Angie had been his flower girl, his inspiration for the stall. After an early killing frost, the little girl had taken dead rose bushes from his upstairs window box. Come spring, she had given the fruit of their seedpods to him as tender potted plants. Nowadays, all his plants and cut flowers arrived on a truck. It was not the same—not so charming as a canny child who could bring roses back to him from the dead.

Did he know the time?

“You have to go? So soon?” His attention was called away by a customer—only for a moment. When he turned back to speak with Angie, she was not beside him anymore and nowhere to be seen. How could she leave him with no goodbye? And she had not taken her roses with her. Not all of them. Only two. And a few dollar bills had been left behind. His eyes searched the street. Her long black robe should have made her a standout in this season of barelegged people.

But no. Poof. Gone. And so fast. How had she—

A woman screamed.

Angie? Oh, God, no!

Coming his way was a gaggle of teenage girls with high-pitched shrieks of laughter. So loud. He turned down the volume of his hearing aid. And the scream was blamed upon them. Damn kids. They could stop a

man's heart.

* * *

“Heads up, everybody.” The walking tour came to a halt in front of a vacant store, and the guide pointed to the apartment house on the other side of the street.

The resident of the second floor, an elderly shut-in, thought this man might be pointing up at her, but no, he sang out the name of a long-dead poet who had once lived here.

She wished the tourists would go away. They impeded her view.

The woman in the wheelchair was a creature of the clock, and precisely fifty minutes remained of her customary hour at the window, time enough for a bit of breakfast and her crossword puzzle. Also, she secretly kept company with the old man down on the sidewalk across the street. Though she had not spoken to him in years, she was that rare old-timer of St. Mark's Place who knew him by name and could recall a day when Albert Costello was a lively, talkative man. Now he was a hermit. However, he did have ritual outings, and so she knew right where to find him every morning at nine o'clock, when she would wheel her chair to the window and there—

Oh! Where was that skinny old fool?

She had looked away from the window to fill in a few blank squares of her puzzle. In only those few seconds, her companion had disappeared, abandoning his post down there by the streetlamp—and long before their shared hour had ended.

Where could he have wandered off to? Albert was as old as she was. He could not move that fast, not even if he had only traveled as far as the door to his apartment building. She scanned the river of tourists on the sidewalk below, but his dear balding head was not there in the swim with them.

Well, that was different. She liked her puzzles, but this one was disturbing.

A woman's scream from the street was less interesting.

* * *

The tour guide faced a clothing store. “That used to be a jazz club. Charlie Parker played there. Greatest sax man who ever lived.” His group paused to snap photographs of the famous nightspot that was not there anymore.

And now they had the attention of a young man in blue jeans, who stood on the sidewalk, tying an apron around his waist. The local trade never amounted to much before noon, but he was in need of a smoke before all those freaking tourists descended on the café. Aw, they were turning his way. Too late? Well, still time for a puff, maybe two.

A cigarette dangled from the waiter's mouth as he leaned against the brick wall and struck a match. He watched a child come round a corner, a blind boy tapping a white cane on the pavement—and ditching school. Good for you, kid. Then, with a flick of the wrist, the boy's cane collapsed to a short wand in a conjuror's sleight of hand.

Neat trick. Was the kid even blind? So sure-footed was this little boy that he was either a faker or very much at home on St. Mark's Place.

A woman screamed. But no heads in the approaching tour group were turning to point the way to any trouble. No, these people were focused. Hungry. And screaming that could not be backed up with blood was written off to street noise. Nothing more.

The tour group no longer blocked his view of the—

The blind boy had disappeared. One second he was there—then gone. He must have ducked into a doorway. But the illusion of a vanishing act remained with the waiter as yet another neat trick.

* * *

Incredibly, the troop of sightseers had witnessed nothing, every pair of eyes turned elsewhere as they spilled into the narrow street and crossed over.

The lady from Bora Bora watched them file into the café. Though she was hungry, breakfast could wait until her son arrived. She looked to the west, the direction of his university. No sign of him. Where was her student prince? She spoke Tahitian, French and a smattering of Japanese, but she had no words that Americans might understand. And so, for the past week, her eldest child had been her guide through this part of the world. He was late to join her for a last meal and a kiss goodbye before she must leave for the airport.

She did not mind the wait. Her homeland in the South Pacific was a place of great beauty and deep peace, but this other island, Manhattan, was an intoxicating display of action—theater of the street. Without her son to translate, some acts would always be inexplicable. And the most recent one had been over in a snatch of seconds when two people had disappeared.

At the end of her long journey home, she would speak of the drama that had unfolded on the sidewalk. She would retell it as a fabulous fable for her youngest child, a little boy who loved nothing better than a scary story. "Flying down the street," she would say to him, "a running woman's long black robe became dark wings spread upon the wind."

In a fury, the Bird Woman of St. Mark's Place had attacked a muscular man and ridden his back—and that part was true. "Claws dug in. Her black wings flapping. His arms flailing." The tense battle of man and giant bird had just begun when they vanished—in seconds—disappearing behind a brief curtain drawn in the form of a sightseers passing by, and so it seemed that Bird Woman had flown up and away with her prey clutched in talons.

Though, in truth, at the sound of the great bird's victory scream, the lady from Bora Bora had never turned her eyes to the sky. The scream had not come from up there. But, for the sake of the story, she would only rely on the magical logic of the moment.

Chapter 1

If they knew why he had come here, all these men would turn him away.

The odyssey had begun in the morning on St. Mark's Place, not half a mile from this SoHo police station, and now it was night. A bank of tall grimy windows worked poorly as mirrors, reflecting his white hair and face, but not his black cassock, and so Father Brenner's head appeared to float across the squad room—slowly—though his mission here was urgent.

Long fluorescent tubes of light spanned the high ceiling, some of them twitchy, blinking off and on with a nervous sputter, and telephones glowed with red lights, the tiny alarms of those left hanging on the line. Half the desks were occupied by tired detectives drinking coffee, tapping keyboards and talking among themselves.

All conversation stopped.

Heads lifted here and there to note his passage, and one man winced when it was apparent that the elderly priest was heading for Kathy Mallory's desk.

Understood.

Father Brenner reminded himself to address her as Detective Mallory, having lost the right to any familiarity when she was a child in his parish school, enrolled there by her foster mother, Helen Markowitz. That good woman had suspected that Kathy was born a Catholic, but suspicion was all that Helen and her husband ever had to work with. The little girl had told them nothing useful, not even her right age. So she might have been ten years old upon that first meeting in his office, but certainly not eleven, the age on her application.

The child had been presented to him in the guise of a small Botticelli angel. Backlit by sunlight that day, her blond curls had gleamed like a dammed halo.

Here, he paused in his recollection and his steps.

Yes, damned was a fitting word for that early impression. A second look at her had pretty much killed his angel analogy. The long slants of her eyes held a shade of green not found in nature, not God's work. Even then, long before she would grow up to carry a gun, he had intuited that she was dangerous. Another early indicator was a teaching nun, who had been left with a rather bad limp to mark the close of Kathy's final semester.

The priest still carried guilt for his blindness to Sister Ursula's eccentricity. No, call it cruelty. Crazy old woman.

Upon his first visit to this police station, he had brought Inspector Markowitz's foster child along to explain the plaster cast on her wrist—and the nun in the hospital. The meeting had not gone well. Guided by a schoolgirl code of Thou shalt not rat, Kathy had refused to confirm Sister Ursula's assault on her. Honoring the child's resolve, the inspector had called it a breakeven day, "My kid's broken wrist for the nun's mangled leg." But outside of Kathy's hearing, Louis Markowitz had offered the priest the angry choice of "Put that nun in a bughouse, or put her down like a dog. Pick one!"

Father Brenner had selected the bughouse option.

Tonight, his eyeglasses sweated down the bridge of his nose. It was taking him such a long time to cross this room and meet with the grownup Kathy Mallory; he was that anxious to see her again. He had spoken with her commanding officer in passing at the downstairs door, and Lieutenant Coffey had waived the protocol of a visitor's badge and pointed the way up the staircase to the Special Crimes Unit. And so the priest might believe that he was coming upon this young woman unannounced—catching her unawares.

Foolish idea? Oh, yes.

As a child, she had given him the eerie sense that her vision extended to the back of her head—and spookier still—to the inside of his head. He kept this illusion saved away with others in his mythology of her, a book of many pages.

Not a holy book.

So far, the young detective in blue jeans appeared normal enough, though rather well-dressed for a civil servant. As a boy, he had worked in his father's tailor shop, and he well knew the quality of the wonderful linen blazer draped on the back of her chair. So good was his sartorial eye, he could even attest to her T-shirt's fine grade of silk.

Kathy Mallory's eyes were focused on the glowing screen of a computer, and the light of a desk lamp gave her another halo, but the priest was long past that deception. As he approached, she did not turn to him in any natural fashion. The golden head swiveled—machinelike—and she did not look up to meet his eyes. No recognition at all. He might well be a piece of furniture with a clerical collar. This was an old, cold quirk of hers, one that used to unhinge him with the thought that she was not quite like the other children, not human, no heart, no pulse.

In a more worldly sense, she was not much changed in her mid-twenties. The high cheekbones were more pronounced, but she was otherwise a taller replica of the child with the cream-white skin and cupid's bow lips. He often wondered if that lovely face had been the chief complaint of Sister Ursula, the ugly antithesis of Kathy. Yes, that would have set the old woman off. The nun would have regarded the infliction of pain as tempering temptations of the flesh, punishing a little girl for the crime of—

"Sit down, Father Brenner." Kathy Mallory's half-smile welcomed him to hell. It was a given that, if she seemed at all happy to see him, it was only because she liked the diversion of toying with his soul—as if she had that power over him.

Well . . . did she not? Obediently, he settled into the wooden chair beside her desk.

"What brings you out tonight?" Her silken voice gave him no clue of inflection. Her red fingernails were more telling, drumming the desktop, prompting him to get on with his reason for bothering her.

He might begin with the news that her old nemesis, Sister Ursula, had died, but before he could open his

mouth, she read his mind to say, "I'm sorry for your loss." Her condolences on the dead nun were delivered with an expression of pure pleasure, the way a cat might smile with a mouse in her teeth—at the moment before she bit down hard to break the creature's back. No mercy, no forgiveness.

No surprise there.

"I've come about another nun," he said. "A young one, close to your age. I'm afraid for her." No sympathy was expected on this account. He could only hope to intrigue. "Sister Michael disappeared yesterday. She's already been reported to Missing Persons. They said they'd look into it. . . . I know what that means." Goodbye, Sister, and best of luck to you. "But I believe she was kidnapped."

"So there's a ransom demand." Hardly intrigued, the detective turned back to the screen of her laptop, a sign of dismissal even before she said, "Go talk to Major Case. They handle that. We do homicides here."

And it would take more than one homicide to interest her. Over the years spent following her career with the NYPD, he had learned that the Special Crimes Unit was best known for cases with a high body count, the bloodiest carnage in New York City.

"Ransom?" He scratched his head in a calculated show of vagueness. "Well, I don't know about that."

"No note? No phone call?" She faced him again, eyes narrowed. "Then why would you think it's a kidnapping?" Clearly, she did not believe him.

Good. That should hold her attention. Oh, just the chance to catch him in a lie, to make him twist and squirm—how she would love that. "This is all I know," he said. "Sister Michael was on the way to visit her mother on St. Marks Place. She started out in the morning, but never got there. That was yesterday. And we both know that Missing Persons is not out looking for her."

"They're swamped with runaways." Her eyes closed in the slow blink of a contented cat, and he knew he had her now, for she was playing harmless when she tossed off the afterthought that, "People are always walking away from their old lives."

"If she wanted to leave her order, she would've worn street clothes, not this." He set a snapshot on the desk. It was a bit damp from his hand. He had carried it all through this day into night. It pictured a young woman in the long robe and veil of a cloistered nun. "And I know she bought two red roses in her mother's neighborhood. I talked to the man who sold—" Oh, no, he was boring her. Well, onto the bit he had saved for last. "I can promise you that Sister Michael's mother does not have the mayor's ear . . . but that man knew about the disappearance before the Missing Persons report was filed."

He thought she might like that part, but it was hard to tell. She was tensing, as if wound by a spring and set to—

She leaned far forward. And, whip-lash fast, he sat well back.

"What else did you hold out on Missing Persons? They're not idiots over there. If you'd told them—"

"I wasn't the one who made that report. . . . I don't even know Sister Michael."

Her eyes flickered. A Eureka moment?

"So the church is cop-shopping," she said. "Reaching out for a detective who'll play nice with the ugly parts. . . . That's why they picked you? Because they think we had a warm, cozy relationship when I was a kid?"

A good guess in some respects.

“I did go to Major Case,” he said. “Their detective sent me away after five minutes. I had no proof of kidnapping. That’s what he told—”

“You think there is proof. You think I can get it for you. So there was a ransom demand.” Her tone accused him of lying. Fair warning. It was confession time at the police station. “Where’d you get your information, Father? I know Mayor Polk won’t play golf with any priest lower than a bishop. Who told you he already knew about—”

“I can’t give you a name.”

“You can!” Her fist hit the desk as punctuation. “Nobody sent you here under the Seal of the Confessional.” Her sudden expression of anger fell away in the flip of a switch to one of resignation, which must be an equally false mask. “All right, just tell me what church politician talks to the city politicians. Does that make it less like ratting out another priest?”

Yes, that would do. “Father DuPont is on the cardinal’s staff. He’d be the one to—”

“And what’s the nun’s name?” She turned away from him to face her computer.

“I told you. Sister—”

“Her real name.”

Not the saint’s name taken with her final vows. The archangel had been a fierce choice for a nun—a name that was the battle cry of the good angles in the War of Heaven. “In her former life, she was known as Angela Quill.”

The detective tapped her keyboard. “So this woman disappears, and you jump to the conclusion of . . . what? A satanic nun collector?” She tilted her head to one side, her face a parody of innocence when she asked, “Why is that?”

“Hey, Mallory.” A man with hooded eyes slouched up to the desk. His dark hair was silvered with enough gray to make him at least twice her age. Raising one hand, he warded off her response. “I know. Half a day shot. I went home for lunch and walked in on a stickup. Took me forever to get through the booking.” He turned an affable smile on the priest. “I live over a bar. The owner’s my landlord. If I’d let the perp walk outta there with the cash, my rent would’ve gone up.” The man sloughed off his wrinkled suit jacket and sat down at the desk that faced and adjoined Kathy Mallory’s. The garment slid from his lap to the floor, and he left it there.

Not a tidy man.

Though the cheap suit did have an odor of spot remover, those shoes had not been polished in recent decades. This wardrobe-challenged detective introduced himself as Riker. “I’m her partner. What can we do for you, Padre?”

Not a Catholic.

Father Brenner pulled a folded sheet of paper from his cassock pocket. The bold type above the nun’s grainy portrait asked, HAVE YOU SEEN HER? This was his mission statement at a glance, and he handed it to the man. “That’s my last one. I’ve been taping them up in store windows.” Sister Michael’s photograph was,

more accurately, a picture of what she wore. Her face was the smallest element in the frame, and not what he had counted upon to stand out in the memory of the public. But her long robe and veil would be a rare sight on city streets.

“A dress-code nun,” said Riker. “Wearing that getup of hers must be hell in this heat. Is she from the Brooklyn convent?”

“No, she’s from the Monastery of St. Bernardine. It’s about sixty miles upstate. The nuns have a website and a tractor, but otherwise, their traditions are centuries old. We have no pictures of Sister Michael in other clothes, and no family members to help with—”

“But her mother’s alive.” Kathy Mallory smiled to say that she had caught him in another lie, though he had yet to make even one false statement. “You told me the nun was on the way to visit her—”

“The mother only had the same photo I used for my poster. I called on the woman this morning.”

Detective Riker held the nun’s poster at arm’s length, the distance for a man who ought to wear bifocals. Brows knit together, eyes squinting, he asked, “Is that face—” The man looked to his partner as if she might have an answer to that half a question.

And she did. As her laptop was angled toward Riker, Father Brenner saw the full-screen display of Sister Michael clad in a torn red camisole that hung from one bruised shoulder by a flimsy string. The makeup was garish. The dark hair was spiked and streaked with purple dye.

It was an old police mug shot.

Kathy Mallory raised her eyebrows, as if only mildly curious. “One of your more interesting nuns?”

Detective Riker stared at the screen image that gave up the name in bold capital letters. “Quill!” He looked down at the poster and tapped the date of the nun’s disappearance. “Two Quills go missing on the same day?”

* * *

Almost there.

Detective Riker had cadged a ride out of SoHo in the backseat of a patrol car, and now he rolled north past the skyscrapers of Midtown, heading for the Upper East Side, the heart of the search for a kidnapped schoolboy.

How long had his partner intended to toy with Father Brenner before mentioning Jonah, the other missing Quill? Riker wasted no pity on the priest. That old man had known what he was dealing with before he walked in the door of Special Crimes.

Kathy Mallory was also—special.

As the car rounded a corner, he saw a familiar face on the street and leaned toward the patrolmen in the front seat. “Guys? I’m gettin’ out here.”

The driver pulled to the curb half a block from this precinct's station house, and Riker stepped out on the sidewalk to shake hands with an old friend, a sergeant like himself, but not in the Detective Bureau. Murray was still in uniform and now in charge of the officers canvassing Jonah Quill's neighborhood.

After their exchange of Good to see your ugly face and What's up, Riker was told why the kidnap story had not been fed to reporters. "The kid's uncle is loaded with money," said Murray. So, on good odds of a ransom demand, the crime had not gone public. And there were no worries about leaks to the press corps. The police commissioner had menaced news outlets all over town with naked threats to people's private parts, a time-honored practice officially known as media cooperation.

Riker slung his suit jacket over one arm as he walked down East Sixty-seventh Street alongside Sergeant Murray. They passed by a woman with a Great Dane on a leash, and the detective had to wonder how large the lady's apartment might be to accommodate a dog the size of a pony. How many acres of floor space? Downtown, south of Houston Street, Riker was considered a social climber because his bathtub was not in the kitchen.

He gave the nun's poster to Murray as they entered the local police station, a landmark building from the late 1800s. Though Riker's own station house was also more than a century old, it was less grand. This one, disguised as an oversized townhouse, had been built to blend into a patch of the 19th Precinct that was filthy with millionaires. But the neighborhood had no flavor, no music. There might be some history to it; the detective did not know or care. No rockers had ever sung songs about this part of town, and that said it all for Riker.

Sergeant Murray, not so vain as the SoHo detective, put on his bifocals, the better to study the small face on the poster. "I'll be damned. Nobody told us about any nun. . . . She looks just like Jonah." He led Riker up the stairs to the second floor, saying over one shoulder, "Tell you what we got. Cops downtown reported sightings of a blind kid tapping his way up a street with a white cane. They can place him in the East Village that morning. But we got other sightings in the Bronx and Queens."

"The East Village fits with Sister Michael," said Riker. "We know she bought flowers on St. Mark's Place around nine that morning."

"Well, this'll get us some leads." Sergeant Murray held up the poster for a second look. "What's up with those dicks at Missing Persons? We should've had a copy of this. The nun's even got the kid's smile."

"Shit happens."

The sergeant nodded to say, Amen, brother, and then he stopped by a closed door at the tops of the stairs. "We keep him in here."

The door opened by a few inches to give Riker a covert look at a civilian half his age, who sat at the far end of a conference table that was littered with paper cups and take-out cartons, pens and yellow pads. The young man's head was bowed, and his hands were clenched together in a white-knuckle prayer.

Murray kept his voice low, saying, "That's the kid's uncle, Harold Quill. He won't go home. Don't expect much, okay? The guy's punchy. No sleep since his nephew disappeared."

The lean, dark-haired Quill sported a stubble of beard, and the wrinkles in his expensive suit were also a few days in the making. When the detective and the sergeant entered the room, the man looked up with the eyes of the boy and the nun, large and gray and ringed with black lashes, but his had a vacant look of no one home. His skin was bloodless. And a puff of air might push him over, not that he would notice.

Riker had seen this before—what was left of a man when a child went missing.

After Sergeant Murray made the introductions, the detective sat down beside the distraught uncle. “So . . . you got a family connection to Angela Quill. Is that right?”

No response? Was this guy debating whether or not he should answer that simple question without legal advice? Rich people—could they even answer a damn phone without a lawyer?

“Angie’s my sister,” said Harold Quill. “She’s a—”

“A nun, yeah. Was she meeting up with your nephew yesterday morning?”

“No! Why would you—” Quill covered his face with both hands, as if that could make a cop disappear, and he shook his head. “I drove Jonah to school. . . . He should’ve been in class.”

“The nun’s gone missing, too. My partner’s downtown talkin’ to your mother. Do you—”

“No!” Harold Quill grabbed Riker’s arm, and the detective pretended not to notice that this man’s fingernails were digging into him. “Promise me,” said Quill, “promise you won’t tell my mother where I live!”

* * *

Detective Mallory was Mrs. Quill’s only visitor from the NYPD. Evidently, her son had failed to tell police that his kidnapped nephew had a grandmother on the Lower East Side. Less surprising, no one had even telephoned for a statement on the disappearance of her daughter, the nun. Most surprising? This woman had taken the dwindling of her family members quite well—as if one or two of them might vanish on a typical day.

“I called the prioress to tell her what I thought of my daughter for standing me up.” In a lower voice, the mother muttered, “That bitch. That whore.”

And would the nice detective like some tea?

Statuettes of saints cluttered every surface in this stuffy parlor that stank of scented, votive candles, the odor of cinnamon warring with rosemary and lavender. All the walls were lined with portraits of Jesus: a laughing Christ and a weeping one, but predominantly bloody, suffering Christs nailed up by hand and foot, and these images had set the tone of the interview with Mrs. Quill, whose mouth was forever frozen in the downturned arc of the righteous, whose eyes were way too wide and laser bright with the light of the Lord.

Mallory sat on the sofa, flipping through the family photograph album. Useless. Most of the faces pictured here had been scratched out, though not all of these erasures were done with the same tool. Some cuts were sharper than others. Beside her sat the scrawny matriarch of the family, dressed in a prim white nightgown. The loudmouthed crone guided the detective, page by page. And so Mallory discovered that images of the husband had been the first mutilations.

“May he rot in hell! He left me with three damn kids.”

Next in the order of abandonment came the scratched-out face of a blond daughter.

“Gabriel. Gabby, we called her. She was fifteen when that picture was taken. That’s when she ran away from me. A year later, she died giving birth to a bastard.” Mrs. Quill said this with great satisfaction, as if that death might have been payback for a child born out of wedlock. The woman lowered her voice and leaned closer to share another happy confidence. “Gabby’s son was born blind.”

Even a more seasoned detective would have flinched. Mallory only looked down at one more photo of a faceless girl, and this one had dark hair.

“Oh, that’s my Angie, the other goddamn whore.” Mrs. Quill reached out one boney hand to turn to the next page, and there was the only unscarred picture of this daughter, a recent addition that had yet to be pasted in with album corners. Sister Michael was posed in the robes of a nun. “She redeemed herself . . . with the church.” Sarcasm suggested that the nun had yet to be redeemed here at home.

Every picture of Mrs. Quill’s son, Harold, had the face scratched out in the year he had sued her for custody of his nephew, Gabby’s blind child. “Poor little Jonah. They stole him from me—Harry and that bitch social worker. By now, the boy’s drowning in sin.” A photograph of this child as a toddler, who had yet to commit any known sin against his grandmother, had survived the knife cuts of omission from the family.

Given more than a nodding acquaintance with Crazy, Mallory had to ask how this woman fancied chances for the survival of Sister Michael and Jonah. “Are they dead or alive?”

“Dead!” This firm vote revealed no guilt, but perhaps the opinion that a nun and a little boy could deserve to lose their lives. Then Mrs. Quill added, “Dead and gone to God,” a slightly better outcome, though offered up with less enthusiasm.

* * *

The walls were brick. The door was metal. The grownups were dead.

Jonah had stepped on their flung-out arms and legs while mapping this chilly room that was fifteen steps square. A queasy horror. And now the stink of them was dulled by clogs of snot brought on by the boy’s crying. He had found his aunt among the corpses.

By touch, he had recognized a long robe and veil, but he knew it was Aunt Angie by the smallest finger of her right hand, broken in her childhood and crooked out at the knuckle. Jonah had held this hand so many times. He could never mistake it for any other.

She had gone away when he was seven years old. For five years, he had waited for her in the fantasy of *She Comes Back*—and here she was.

He kissed her crooked finger.

High on the wall and beyond his reach, the loud motor started up again with the death rattle of an old machine, its parts clacking, broken or breaking down, but still churning out more blasts of cold air. Shivering, Jonah laid his body down beside his aunt. She gave him comfort—and warmth. Her wide robe was generous enough to cover him, too. “Thank you.”

Pieces of a day were missing. Or was it two days? His internal clock was broken. There was a rumble in his

stomach, but the thought of food made him want to puke. Was his brain busted, too? Dumbed down? Only now he thought to wonder what had happened to him—to her.

How could she be dead?

Aunt Angie knew how to fight. On her way out of his life, she had taught him that fingernails could draw blood, thumbs could gouge out eyes, and a kick to the balls could put a man in a world of hurt. And then she had walked out the door to catch a bus to God's house.

Had she known then what was coming—who was coming?

Her killer would never suspect him until it was too late. He could walk right up to that sick bastard and play helpless—just a kid, right?—and then nail him. Kill him? Yes! Beneath the blanket of the shared robe, Jonah's fists made one-two punches. No fear. Aunt Angie was with him, keeping him warm, teaching him how to draw blood and bring on pain. His aunt's side of this conversation was made up from saved-away memories of her, the sound of her, but all the words had the ring of true things. He knew what she would say to every—

The air conditioner shut down. Now a new sound. Metal on metal. A squeak to a door hinge. And the dead woman's voice inside his head screamed, That's him!

The boy shook off the robe and sat up.

Footsteps. Heavy ones. Aunt Angie sang out, Get ready!

Jonah was shaking and shot through with freaking cold, heart-a-banging panic.

The footsteps stopped a few paces into the room. Jonah rocked his body like a toddler with a wooden horse between his legs. The hard-soled shoes were crossing the floor, coming for him. They were here! Now the smell of cigarette breath. So close. Puffs of stinky air on his face.

Close enough! yelled Aunt Angie.

A man's deeper voice, a real one, said, "You can't see."

Jonah, get him!

Sorry, so sorry, but he could not do that. He was crazy scared. A small bottle of sloshing liquid was pressed into his hands—a reward for getting the rules right in a world where twelve-year-old boys were always outmatched by grown men. Sorry.

The bottled water tasted odd. No matter. So thirsty. Jonah drank it, gulped it down. All gone now. His rocking slowed—and stopped. His fear ebbed away, dulling down to nothing. Sleep was creeping up on him.

Behind him was the man's hard-sole step. Stepping over the other bodies? Light plops. Dull scrapes. A quick shuffle of shoes. The door opened and closed, shoes leaving and coming back again—and again. More steps and shuffles, rustles and—what?

No! Jonah shook his head, shaking off a mind-muddling fog.

He reached for Aunt Angie's hand. No, no, no—she was sliding away, leaving him. Her body was dragged across the floor faster than he could crawl after her. Not fair! He rose up on his knees, as much of a stand as

he could manage, and his hands balled into fists. "Give her back!"

The door went BANG!

And the boy fell, toppling to one side. Sleep came on so fast. He never felt the pain of hard ground rushing up to meet him with a knock to the head that said, Goodnight!

Chapter 2

The trees of Carl Schurz Park gave cover to Gracie Mansion, the official residence of the mayor. In the small hours of the morning, an alarm had sounded, and now this eighteenth-century landmark and its adjoining wing were surrounded by sheets of plastic tied off on ten-foot poles. Above this curtain, only the upper half of the extension building could be seen by civilians on East End Avenue. They saw nothing of the more secluded yellow mansion that overlooked the channel waters of Hell Gate—and the corpses stacked up on the lawn.

Members of the hazmat team were visible through the cloudy plastic as they moved about in helmets and bulky white suits that were sealed to protect them against deadly gasses and flesh-eating viruses or come what may.

On the broad sidewalk across the street, their audience was sporting Sunday-best T-shirts, shorts and summer dresses. The atmosphere turned festive as the crowd applauded the first sighting of bright-colored umbrellas attached to rolling carts. Food vendors had turned out to cater this new threat to public health and safety. Men in aprons hawked their wares along the roadbed, first servicing the front lines. Then hungry buyers at the rear sent their money forward, hand-to-hand, and bags of bagels and coffee were handed back to them.

Men and women in dark suits held up the IDs of Homeland Security, and they yelled at the civilians, ordering them to move on. Predictably, these federal agents were ignored. The menace implied by moon suits had scared off out-of-towners, but not blasé natives who always formed a crowd for the prospect of sudden death in New York City. And, dammit, it was time for brunch.

Behind the backs of the shouting agents, a cadre of uniformed police officers stood in a line down the center of the avenue, and they all wore smirks of *We told you so, you stupid bastards*. The NYPD knew how to do crowd control. And, clearly, the federal government did not.

Some civilians with curb-side views sat on canvas camp stools sold from a cart with merchandise that included paper fans and sun visors. Most of the crowd remained standing, growing restless as they watched the slow, blurry movements of the hazmat team. New York attitude was in the air, and it demanded, *Hey, let's get on with the show!*

* * *

Two detectives stood behind the gawkers. One wore an out-of-date suit that spoke well of him as a civil servant who lived within his means, though, truth be told, Riker hated shopping and had let it slide for years.

He gave his partner a gallant wave that said, *Ladies first*, so he could use tall Mallory as a wedge to move through this tightly packed mob. People tended to get out of her way, and not because they respected the

badge or her tailored threads—or the running shoes that cost more than Riker’s entire closet, shoes thrown in. The whole package said that she was somebody, but the Mallory effect on crowds was more than that. When she wanted to jangle a civilian—like right now—she dropped every pretense of being human and walked toward the poor bastard as if she meant to walk right through him, and this was all that was needed to inspire that man’s wary backward dance.

Just a hint of crazy got a world of respect in this town, though there were detectives in the Special Crimes Unit who suspected that Kathy Mallory was not hinting. She might be the real deal. Riker believed she knew this and encouraged it in the same way that the clothes on her back flaunted the idea of a cop who might be dirty.

She liked her games. She played them well.

When they reached the street, Riker ignored the government suits—so as not to lose face with the cops on the line. He spoke to the uniform with the sergeant’s stripe, “What’s up, Murray? You got a body count?”

“Yeah, I seen four of ’em in there.” The sergeant glanced at officers to his left and right, indicating that this was not a good time to thank him for a tip on a dead nun. “The security cameras are useless—blacked out with paintballs. But I know the perp was wearing NYPD blue last night. On the other side of the park, we found a cop knocked out cold and stripped down to his skivvies.”

Mallory was distracted by an argument half a block away. It looked to be one-sided, no fists in play yet, but getting there. Riker also watched this scene as a government agent, red in the face, rose off the balls of his feet, trying so hard to be taller. The fed was outsized by the man who set a Gladstone bag down on the sidewalk at his booted feet. Chief Medical Examiner Edward Slope ripped off his protective helmet and gloves. The doctor’s anger was more dignified—and more effective. The flat of one raised hand silenced the younger, shorter man from Homeland Security. Now it was Dr. Slope’s turn to vent, and the federal agent came down from his tiptoes.

“A scam.” Without hearing one clear word, Mallory had the gist of the ME’s complaint. “Those moon suits are just for show, right?”

“That’s my guess,” said Sergeant Murray. “What we got in there is weird, but it’s got shit to do with germs or poison gas. I figure the mayor wanted to keep people outta the park . . . on a Sunday. Well, forget that.” With a nod toward the plastic curtain, he said, “So one of those clowns in there called out the hazmat team. Figured that’d scare ’em off.” He turned back to the bagel-noshing sidewalk crowd. “Do they look scared to you?”

Since diplomacy was not his partner’s forte, Riker walked down the street to join the kiddy agent in charge of false alarms and circuses. The detective offered this youngster the carrot of being addressed as a grownup. “Look, pal, I know you got jerked around today, but don’t go off on anybody else, okay? We need some leverage here. Just pack up the moon suits and go.”

“Somebody’s gotta pay for dragging out the whole damn—”

“Me and my partner, we can make that happen. We can make the pack of ’em wish they’d never screwed with you.” In the hierarchy of New York City, this was a fairy tale, but the young agent seemed to like the story.

Most helpful customer reviews

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful.

It's Mallory Being Mallory

By Rev Ed

Kathy Mallory (Don't call her Kathy!) is one of the great characters in mystery fiction, and Carol O'Connell is one of the great writers. Why isn't anyone making a series? Like Mallory herself, *Blind Sight* is fascinating, dark, witty, confusing and somehow irresistible. It's probably not the book to start with, if the series is new to you; some degree of familiarity with Mallory, Riker, Charles and other regulars is assumed. And don't expect a linear narrative. Like my other favorite Kate Atkinson, O'Connell teases with intricate webs and unexpected detours. I made sometimes be confused, but I've learned by now that she is always in charge. I'm already impatient for the next Mallory.

7 of 8 people found the following review helpful.

Mallory is back and at her best

By Katherine M.

This is one of my favorite Mallory novels in a long while. The case was not only interesting but riveting and the pacing was very well done. As the perspective changed from the different characters each story was insightful in its own way as the novel slowly brought everything together. Many times in these novels it's felt like filler until we got back to the main characters. Unlike past novels this one didn't repeat endlessly Mallory's quirks like the reader had forgotten her stunning looks, her way with computers, her driving or her people skills but instead showed them more than just stating them. There were fun references to her baby thief days but just the right amount and not overly mentioned. The usual cast of characters was back to support our favorite detective but for me there could have been more of my favorites. I do wish the MD would stop selling Mallory so short which I always find sad. If you are a Mallory fan you will not be disappointed with this one. If you are unfamiliar with this series then start at book 1 or will miss much of the nuance of the characters and the whole series is well worth a read.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

I can't resist a Mallory book.

By Judy S

Carol O'Connell never disappoints. Fascinating characters and a complex female detective protagonist.

A nun (former prostitute) is killed and her blind nephew is kidnapped. Four bodies with their hearts removed are dumped, along with the dead nun, on the mayor's lawn. The story alternates between the kidnapper (a hired hit man) and the police investigation on the murders. Can Mallory solve it in time to rescue the boy before he becomes the next victim?

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Review

Praise for Blind Sight

“Carol O'Connell's latest novel featuring Special Crimes Unit Detective Kathy Mallory has an almost Dickensian feel. In her own way, O'Connell is as quirky and elusive as Mallory. [F]or those readers looking to escape the usual police procedurals, she's the ticket.” — Chicago Tribune

“O'Connell's 12th Mallory novel has all of her trademarks: a twisty puzzle, page-turning suspense, and a dark and complex city of corruption. Above all is the cool, scary Mallory, who sees through the smokescreen of civility to the violence within. As one character says, 'Vengeance, thy name is Mallory.'...A solid entry -- The mystery is satisfyingly complex, and the pace makes it hard to put down.” — Library Journal

“Kathy Mallory's twelfth outing showcases the unparalleled characterization and powerful backstory that have made this a bar-raising hard-boiled series ... Mallory's street-sharpened tactics are as riveting as ever.” — Booklist, starred review

“As in previous novels, Mallory's quirky personality shows "just a hint of crazy," and sometimes, to unnerve people, she drops "every pretense of being human." She's an entertaining, slightly over-the-top protagonist with brains and attitude. Colorful and appealing (or appalling) characters make this one a winner for crime-fic fans.” — Kirkus, starred review

“Both slickly cool and hot to the touch, Carol O'Connell's Blind Sight is a master class in suspense. As her detective hero, the inscrutable and fascinating Mallory, plunges into darker and darker terrain, we feel lucky—thrilled—to be along for the ride.” —New York Times bestselling author MEGAN ABBOTT

“Do I really need to say anything other than Mallory is back? And she's darker, more sly and disturbing than ever. Carol O'Connell is at her finest in this addictive, riveting, stylish, powerful psychological thriller. Once again, she's raised the bar for crime fiction.” — M. J. ROSE, New York Times bestselling author

“Affecting, fast-moving...Most of the novel's emotional pull steams from blind 12-year-old kidnap victim Jonah Quill, whose tiny hope of survival may hinge on his own considerable wits, [a] gripping life-and-death drama.” — Publishers Weekly

“As in other novels featuring Mallory and her partner, Mallory seems just a little freaky, with a lot of real brain power and a whole lot of attitude toward her underlings. This is twelfth in a series by Carol O’Connell featuring the cool Detective Mallory and, at times, is a highly frightening book that keeps the reader on edge. Mallory shows her extremely smart mind and her absolute dedication to the job. She is one member of the law who can live, no matter what happens, on the very dangerous streets of the big city.” — Suspense Magazine

“Marry the intuition and problem-solving skills of Lincoln Rhyme with the action-figure street smarts and stunts of Jack Reacher, and you’ll come up with someone very close to NYPD Detective Kathy Mallory...A bit of a sociopath herself, she thinks something rather darker is at play (and hey, you have to go some distance to find something darker than a killer who surgically removes the hearts of his prey). As long as O’Connell keeps pumping out crime fiction like this, she will have a faithful reader in me.” — BookPage

“O’Connell’s exceptional novel is complex and heart wrenching. Her attention to detail is meticulous and her depiction of the scheming of multiple characters who attempt to outsmart each other is superb. She rises to the art of unraveling the many surprises without giving anything away. Her use of the background of characters to form their current personalities is genius.” — RT Book Reviews

“Detective Mallory remains one of the most original, and intriguing cops on the planet ... *Blind Sight* is a classy, classic, riveting read.” — Open Letters Monthly

Praise for Carol O'Connell

“M is for Mallory—Kathy Mallory, bestseller O’Connell’s powerful and powerfully flawed New York Special Crimes Unit detective. M is also for morbid, macabre, and mordant—adjectives that can be applied to the plot, the prose, and the humor of this dazzling 11th novel in the series. Mallory’s bravura performance wreaks justice both inside and outside the legal system.” —Publishers Weekly

“Enthralling . . . Mallory continues to be an enigmatic and fascinating character. Despite an impeccable fashion sense and movie-star good looks, Mallory is as much a feral being as she was when she was first rescued from the streets as a child. Her closest counterpoint in mystery fiction is Lisbeth Salander.” —Oline Cogdill, *Mystery Scene Magazine*

“NYPD Special Crimes Detective Kathy Mallory is one of the most intriguing characters in crime fiction today.” —New York Daily News

“Like all the Mallory novels, this one is a solid police procedural with a twisty plot, and Mallory is a fascinating, rich character. Fans won’t want to miss this.” —Library Journal

“Carol O’Connell is one of my favorite writers.” —New York Times-bestselling author Karin Slaughter

“Before Salander took the world by storm, there was Mallory, the most gloriously original heroine to grace crime fiction’s meanest and darkest streets.” —Sarah Weinman, author of *Troubled Daughters, Twisted Wives*

About the Author

This is Carol O’Connell’s twelfth Mallory novel. The others are *Mallory’s Oracle*, *The Man Who Cast Two Shadows*, *Killing Critics*, *Stone Angel*, *Shell Game*, *Crime School*, *Dead Famous*, *Winter House*, *Find Me*, *The Chalk Girl*, and *It Happens in the Dark*. She is also the author of two stand-alones, *Judas Child* and *Bone*

By Bone. O'Connell lives in New York City.

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Prologue

The unusual was common here, yet the heads of local people did turn to stare as she walked by. Others, the sightseers, only looked at landmarks for the way life used to be. They had little interest in life ongoing all around them, and so the woman robed in black moved past them. In plain sight. Unseen.

Shops and cafés opened under a blue sky over St. Marks Place, and the first wave of tourists, a dozen or so, gathered round their guide as he spoke of a bygone era when this neighborhood was edgy, dangerous, drugged up—and fun, when the nights had reeked of marijuana for three city blocks. “No need to score reefer in those days,” he said. “You’d just breathe deep and get stoned. It was a party that went on for years.”

“Decades,” said a portly, white-haired New Yorker, who had lived all his long life in an apartment above the family bodega. He turned his back on the tourists to work a squeaky crank on the wall. With a few swift turns, he lowered a striped awning to give his flower stall some shade. The stall was shallow, sized to fit a narrow sidewalk that was choked with sneakers and sandals as the walking tour walked on.

Cars were forced to share the roadbed with two aging rock 'n' rollers on foot. The bodega's proprietor had a good eye for such people. Pilgrims, he called them. They stopped to snap pictures of their shrine, a brownstone that had appeared on an album cover dating back to music on vinyl and songs that were old when those two were young.

Stepping out from the shade of his awning, the elderly man looked up at the sky. Cloudless. How he loved these early summer days when shoplifting children were still jailed in their classrooms. By a movement caught in the corner of one eye, he knew something dark was coming his way, and this, the first shock of the morning, brought out his widest smile.

“Angie!” How many years had gone by? Too many. “So grown up!” Such a liar he was. Angela Quill had not aged a day. She was in her twenties now, but those big gray eyes were the eyes of a child who had yet to grow into them.

When he released the girl from a bear hug, he stepped back to stare at what she wore, what she had become. The veil—even that was no longer common in her trade. But what of the rest? A white wimple framed her face. The wide black robe had enough material to clothe three of her. And there was length enough to hide her feet—so out of place in this age of raised hemlines for holy women.

He plucked out his hearing aid to fiddle the volume and cure a squeal in the works. “What? Say again?” Oh, she was a cloistered nun? He never would have chosen that path for her. Such women were shut away from the world, sealed up behind walls until they died.

Yet here she was—out and about in the city. How could that be? What—

She wanted to buy flowers, but the ones in his stall were all wrapped by the dozen in bouquets. Would he sell her only two roses? She had money for two.

“For you? Here.” He loaded her arms with two dozen red blooms—so happy was he to see her again. “And I won’t take your money.” They talked a while, and his every sentence began with “I remember when—” When she was only ten years old, Angie had been his flower girl, his inspiration for the stall. After an early killing frost, the little girl had taken dead rose bushes from his upstairs window box. Come spring, she had given the fruit of their seedpods to him as tender potted plants. Nowadays, all his plants and cut flowers arrived on a truck. It was not the same—not so charming as a canny child who could bring roses back to him from the dead.

Did he know the time?

“You have to go? So soon?” His attention was called away by a customer—only for a moment. When he turned back to speak with Angie, she was not beside him anymore and nowhere to be seen. How could she leave him with no goodbye? And she had not taken her roses with her. Not all of them. Only two. And a few dollar bills had been left behind. His eyes searched the street. Her long black robe should have made her a standout in this season of barelegged people.

But no. Poof. Gone. And so fast. How had she—

A woman screamed.

Angie? Oh, God, no!

Coming his way was a gaggle of teenage girls with high-pitched shrieks of laughter. So loud. He turned down the volume of his hearing aid. And the scream was blamed upon them. Damn kids. They could stop a man’s heart.

* * *

“Heads up, everybody.” The walking tour came to a halt in front of a vacant store, and the guide pointed to the apartment house on the other side of the street.

The resident of the second floor, an elderly shut-in, thought this man might be pointing up at her, but no, he sang out the name of a long-dead poet who had once lived here.

She wished the tourists would go away. They impeded her view.

The woman in the wheelchair was a creature of the clock, and precisely fifty minutes remained of her customary hour at the window, time enough for a bit of breakfast and her crossword puzzle. Also, she secretly kept company with the old man down on the sidewalk across the street. Though she had not spoken to him in years, she was that rare old-timer of St. Mark’s Place who knew him by name and could recall a day when Albert Costello was a lively, talkative man. Now he was a hermit. However, he did have ritual outings, and so she knew right where to find him every morning at nine o’clock, when she would wheel her chair to the window and there—

Oh! Where was that skinny old fool?

She had looked away from the window to fill in a few blank squares of her puzzle. In only those few seconds, her companion had disappeared, abandoning his post down there by the streetlamp—and long before their shared hour had ended.

Where could he have wandered off to? Albert was as old as she was. He could not move that fast, not even if he had only traveled as far as the door to his apartment building. She scanned the river of tourists on the sidewalk below, but his dear balding head was not there in the swim with them.

Well, that was different. She liked her puzzles, but this one was disturbing.

A woman's scream from the street was less interesting.

* * *

The tour guide faced a clothing store. "That used to be a jazz club. Charlie Parker played there. Greatest sax man who ever lived." His group paused to snap photographs of the famous nightspot that was not there anymore.

And now they had the attention of a young man in blue jeans, who stood on the sidewalk, tying an apron around his waist. The local trade never amounted to much before noon, but he was in need of a smoke before all those freaking tourists descended on the café. Aw, they were turning his way. Too late? Well, still time for a puff, maybe two.

A cigarette dangled from the waiter's mouth as he leaned against the brick wall and struck a match. He watched a child come round a corner, a blind boy tapping a white cane on the pavement—and ditching school. Good for you, kid. Then, with a flick of the wrist, the boy's cane collapsed to a short wand in a conjuror's sleight of hand.

Neat trick. Was the kid even blind? So sure-footed was this little boy that he was either a faker or very much at home on St. Mark's Place.

A woman screamed. But no heads in the approaching tour group were turning to point the way to any trouble. No, these people were focused. Hungry. And screaming that could not be backed up with blood was written off to street noise. Nothing more.

The tour group no longer blocked his view of the—

The blind boy had disappeared. One second he was there—then gone. He must have ducked into a doorway. But the illusion of a vanishing act remained with the waiter as yet another neat trick.

* * *

Incredibly, the troop of sightseers had witnessed nothing, every pair of eyes turned elsewhere as they spilled into the narrow street and crossed over.

The lady from Bora Bora watched them file into the café. Though she was hungry, breakfast could wait until her son arrived. She looked to the west, the direction of his university. No sign of him. Where was her student prince? She spoke Tahitian, French and a smattering of Japanese, but she had no words that Americans might understand. And so, for the past week, her eldest child had been her guide through this part of the world. He was late to join her for a last meal and a kiss goodbye before she must leave for the airport.

She did not mind the wait. Her homeland in the South Pacific was a place of great beauty and deep peace, but this other island, Manhattan, was an intoxicating display of action—theater of the street. Without her son to translate, some acts would always be inexplicable. And the most recent one had been over in a snatch of seconds when two people had disappeared.

At the end of her long journey home, she would speak of the drama that had unfolded on the sidewalk. She would retell it as a fabulous fable for her youngest child, a little boy who loved nothing better than a scary story. “Flying down the street,” she would say to him, “a running woman’s long black robe became dark wings spread upon the wind.”

In a fury, the Bird Woman of St. Mark’s Place had attacked a muscular man and ridden his back—and that part was true. “Claws dug in. Her black wings flapping. His arms flailing.” The tense battle of man and giant bird had just begun when they vanished—in seconds—disappearing behind a brief curtain drawn in the form of a sightseers passing by, and so it seemed that Bird Woman had flown up and away with her prey clutched in talons.

Though, in truth, at the sound of the great bird’s victory scream, the lady from Bora Bora had never turned her eyes to the sky. The scream had not come from up there. But, for the sake of the story, she would only rely on the magical logic of the moment.

Chapter 1

If they knew why he had come here, all these men would turn him away.

The odyssey had begun in the morning on St. Mark’s Place, not half a mile from this SoHo police station, and now it was night. A bank of tall grimy windows worked poorly as mirrors, reflecting his white hair and face, but not his black cassock, and so Father Brenner’s head appeared to float across the squad room—slowly—though his mission here was urgent.

Long fluorescent tubes of light spanned the high ceiling, some of them twitchy, blinking off and on with a nervous sputter, and telephones glowed with red lights, the tiny alarms of those left hanging on the line. Half

the desks were occupied by tired detectives drinking coffee, tapping keyboards and talking among themselves.

All conversation stopped.

Heads lifted here and there to note his passage, and one man winced when it was apparent that the elderly priest was heading for Kathy Mallory's desk.

Understood.

Father Brenner reminded himself to address her as Detective Mallory, having lost the right to any familiarity when she was a child in his parish school, enrolled there by her foster mother, Helen Markowitz. That good woman had suspected that Kathy was born a Catholic, but suspicion was all that Helen and her husband ever had to work with. The little girl had told them nothing useful, not even her right age. So she might have been ten years old upon that first meeting in his office, but certainly not eleven, the age on her application.

The child had been presented to him in the guise of a small Botticelli angel. Backlit by sunlight that day, her blond curls had gleamed like a dammed halo.

Here, he paused in his recollection and his steps.

Yes, damned was a fitting word for that early impression. A second look at her had pretty much killed his angel analogy. The long slants of her eyes held a shade of green not found in nature, not God's work. Even then, long before she would grow up to carry a gun, he had intuited that she was dangerous. Another early indicator was a teaching nun, who had been left with a rather bad limp to mark the close of Kathy's final semester.

The priest still carried guilt for his blindness to Sister Ursula's eccentricity. No, call it cruelty. Crazy old woman.

Upon his first visit to this police station, he had brought Inspector Markowitz's foster child along to explain the plaster cast on her wrist—and the nun in the hospital. The meeting had not gone well. Guided by a schoolgirl code of Thou shalt not rat, Kathy had refused to confirm Sister Ursula's assault on her. Honoring the child's resolve, the inspector had called it a breakeven day, "My kid's broken wrist for the nun's mangled leg." But outside of Kathy's hearing, Louis Markowitz had offered the priest the angry choice of "Put that nun in a bughouse, or put her down like a dog. Pick one!"

Father Brenner had selected the bughouse option.

Tonight, his eyeglasses sweated down the bridge of his nose. It was taking him such a long time to cross this room and meet with the grownup Kathy Mallory; he was that anxious to see her again. He had spoken with her commanding officer in passing at the downstairs door, and Lieutenant Coffey had waived the protocol of a visitor's badge and pointed the way up the staircase to the Special Crimes Unit. And so the priest might believe that he was coming upon this young woman unannounced—catching her unawares.

Foolish idea? Oh, yes.

As a child, she had given him the eerie sense that her vision extended to the back of her head—and spookier still—to the inside of his head. He kept this illusion saved away with others in his mythology of her, a book of many pages.

Not a holy book.

So far, the young detective in blue jeans appeared normal enough, though rather well-dressed for a civil servant. As a boy, he had worked in his father's tailor shop, and he well knew the quality of the wonderful linen blazer draped on the back of her chair. So good was his sartorial eye, he could even attest to her T-shirt's fine grade of silk.

Kathy Mallory's eyes were focused on the glowing screen of a computer, and the light of a desk lamp gave her another halo, but the priest was long past that deception. As he approached, she did not turn to him in any natural fashion. The golden head swiveled—machinelike—and she did not look up to meet his eyes. No recognition at all. He might well be a piece of furniture with a clerical collar. This was an old, cold quirk of hers, one that used to unhinge him with the thought that she was not quite like the other children, not human, no heart, no pulse.

In a more worldly sense, she was not much changed in her mid-twenties. The high cheekbones were more pronounced, but she was otherwise a taller replica of the child with the cream-white skin and cupid's bow lips. He often wondered if that lovely face had been the chief complaint of Sister Ursula, the ugly antithesis of Kathy. Yes, that would have set the old woman off. The nun would have regarded the infliction of pain as tempering temptations of the flesh, punishing a little girl for the crime of—

“Sit down, Father Brenner.” Kathy Mallory's half-smile welcomed him to hell. It was a given that, if she seemed at all happy to see him, it was only because she liked the diversion of toying with his soul—as if she had that power over him.

Well . . . did she not? Obediently, he settled into the wooden chair beside her desk.

“What brings you out tonight?” Her silken voice gave him no clue of inflection. Her red fingernails were more telling, drumming the desktop, prompting him to get on with his reason for bothering her.

He might begin with the news that her old nemesis, Sister Ursula, had died, but before he could open his mouth, she read his mind to say, “I'm sorry for your loss.” Her condolences on the dead nun were delivered with an expression of pure pleasure, the way a cat might smile with a mouse in her teeth—at the moment before she bit down hard to break the creature's back. No mercy, no forgiveness.

No surprise there.

“I've come about another nun,” he said. “A young one, close to your age. I'm afraid for her.” No sympathy was expected on this account. He could only hope to intrigue. “Sister Michael disappeared yesterday. She's already been reported to Missing Persons. They said they'd look into it. . . . I know what that means.” Goodbye, Sister, and best of luck to you. “But I believe she was kidnapped.”

“So there's a ransom demand.” Hardly intrigued, the detective turned back to the screen of her laptop, a sign of dismissal even before she said, “Go talk to Major Case. They handle that. We do homicides here.”

And it would take more than one homicide to interest her. Over the years spent following her career with the NYPD, he had learned that the Special Crimes Unit was best known for cases with a high body count, the bloodiest carnage in New York City.

“Ransom?” He scratched his head in a calculated show of vagueness. “Well, I don't know about that.”

“No note? No phone call?” She faced him again, eyes narrowed. “Then why would you think it's a kidnapping?” Clearly, she did not believe him.

Good. That should hold her attention. Oh, just the chance to catch him in a lie, to make him twist and squirm—how she would love that. “This is all I know,” he said. “Sister Michael was on the way to visit her mother on St. Marks Place. She started out in the morning, but never got there. That was yesterday. And we both know that Missing Persons is not out looking for her.”

“They’re swamped with runaways.” Her eyes closed in the slow blink of a contented cat, and he knew he had her now, for she was playing harmless when she tossed off the afterthought that, “People are always walking away from their old lives.”

“If she wanted to leave her order, she would’ve worn street clothes, not this.” He set a snapshot on the desk. It was a bit damp from his hand. He had carried it all through this day into night. It pictured a young woman in the long robe and veil of a cloistered nun. “And I know she bought two red roses in her mother’s neighborhood. I talked to the man who sold—” Oh, no, he was boring her. Well, onto the bit he had saved for last. “I can promise you that Sister Michael’s mother does not have the mayor’s ear . . . but that man knew about the disappearance before the Missing Persons report was filed.”

He thought she might like that part, but it was hard to tell. She was tensing, as if wound by a spring and set to—

She leaned far forward. And, whip-lash fast, he sat well back.

“What else did you hold out on Missing Persons? They’re not idiots over there. If you’d told them—”

“I wasn’t the one who made that report. . . . I don’t even know Sister Michael.”

Her eyes flickered. A Eureka moment?

“So the church is cop-shopping,” she said. “Reaching out for a detective who’ll play nice with the ugly parts. . . . That’s why they picked you? Because they think we had a warm, cozy relationship when I was a kid?”

A good guess in some respects.

“I did go to Major Case,” he said. “Their detective sent me away after five minutes. I had no proof of kidnapping. That’s what he told—”

“You think there is proof. You think I can get it for you. So there was a ransom demand.” Her tone accused him of lying. Fair warning. It was confession time at the police station. “Where’d you get your information, Father? I know Mayor Polk won’t play golf with any priest lower than a bishop. Who told you he already knew about—”

“I can’t give you a name.”

“You can!” Her fist hit the desk as punctuation. “Nobody sent you here under the Seal of the Confessional.” Her sudden expression of anger fell away in the flip of a switch to one of resignation, which must be an equally false mask. “All right, just tell me what church politician talks to the city politicians. Does that make it less like ratting out another priest?”

Yes, that would do. “Father DuPont is on the cardinal’s staff. He’d be the one to—”

“And what’s the nun’s name?” She turned away from him to face her computer.

“I told you. Sister—”

“Her real name.”

Not the saint’s name taken with her final vows. The archangel had been a fierce choice for a nun—a name that was the battle cry of the good angles in the War of Heaven. “In her former life, she was known as Angela Quill.”

The detective tapped her keyboard. “So this woman disappears, and you jump to the conclusion of . . . what? A satanic nun collector?” She tilted her head to one side, her face a parody of innocence when she asked, “Why is that?”

“Hey, Mallory.” A man with hooded eyes slouched up to the desk. His dark hair was silvered with enough gray to make him at least twice her age. Raising one hand, he warded off her response. “I know. Half a day shot. I went home for lunch and walked in on a stickup. Took me forever to get through the booking.” He turned an affable smile on the priest. “I live over a bar. The owner’s my landlord. If I’d let the perp walk outta there with the cash, my rent would’ve gone up.” The man sloughed off his wrinkled suit jacket and sat down at the desk that faced and adjoined Kathy Mallory’s. The garment slid from his lap to the floor, and he left it there.

Not a tidy man.

Though the cheap suit did have an odor of spot remover, those shoes had not been polished in recent decades. This wardrobe-challenged detective introduced himself as Riker. “I’m her partner. What can we do for you, Padre?”

Not a Catholic.

Father Brenner pulled a folded sheet of paper from his cassock pocket. The bold type above the nun’s grainy portrait asked, HAVE YOU SEEN HER? This was his mission statement at a glance, and he handed it to the man. “That’s my last one. I’ve been taping them up in store windows.” Sister Michael’s photograph was, more accurately, a picture of what she wore. Her face was the smallest element in the frame, and not what he had counted upon to stand out in the memory of the public. But her long robe and veil would be a rare sight on city streets.

“A dress-code nun,” said Riker. “Wearing that getup of hers must be hell in this heat. Is she from the Brooklyn convent?”

“No, she’s from the Monastery of St. Bernardine. It’s about sixty miles upstate. The nuns have a website and a tractor, but otherwise, their traditions are centuries old. We have no pictures of Sister Michael in other clothes, and no family members to help with—”

“But her mother’s alive.” Kathy Mallory smiled to say that she had caught him in another lie, though he had yet to make even one false statement. “You told me the nun was on the way to visit her—”

“The mother only had the same photo I used for my poster. I called on the woman this morning.”

Detective Riker held the nun’s poster at arm’s length, the distance for a man who ought to wear bifocals. Brows knit together, eyes squinting, he asked, “Is that face—” The man looked to his partner as if she might have an answer to that half a question.

And she did. As her laptop was angled toward Riker, Father Brenner saw the full-screen display of Sister Michael clad in a torn red camisole that hung from one bruised shoulder by a flimsy string. The makeup was

garish. The dark hair was spiked and streaked with purple dye.

It was an old police mug shot.

Kathy Mallory raised her eyebrows, as if only mildly curious. “One of your more interesting nuns?”

Detective Riker stared at the screen image that gave up the name in bold capital letters. “Quill!” He looked down at the poster and tapped the date of the nun’s disappearance. “Two Quills go missing on the same day?”

* * *

Almost there.

Detective Riker had cadged a ride out of SoHo in the backseat of a patrol car, and now he rolled north past the skyscrapers of Midtown, heading for the Upper East Side, the heart of the search for a kidnapped schoolboy.

How long had his partner intended to toy with Father Brenner before mentioning Jonah, the other missing Quill? Riker wasted no pity on the priest. That old man had known what he was dealing with before he walked in the door of Special Crimes.

Kathy Mallory was also—special.

As the car rounded a corner, he saw a familiar face on the street and leaned toward the patrolmen in the front seat. “Guys? I’m gettin’ out here.”

The driver pulled to the curb half a block from this precinct’s station house, and Riker stepped out on the sidewalk to shake hands with an old friend, a sergeant like himself, but not in the Detective Bureau. Murray was still in uniform and now in charge of the officers canvassing Jonah Quill’s neighborhood.

After their exchange of Good to see your ugly face and What’s up, Riker was told why the kidnap story had not been fed to reporters. “The kid’s uncle is loaded with money,” said Murray. So, on good odds of a ransom demand, the crime had not gone public. And there were no worries about leaks to the press corps. The police commissioner had menaced news outlets all over town with naked threats to people’s private parts, a time-honored practice officially known as media cooperation.

Riker slung his suit jacket over one arm as he walked down East Sixty-seventh Street alongside Sergeant Murray. They passed by a woman with a Great Dane on a leash, and the detective had to wonder how large the lady’s apartment might be to accommodate a dog the size of a pony. How many acres of floor space? Downtown, south of Houston Street, Riker was considered a social climber because his bathtub was not in the kitchen.

He gave the nun’s poster to Murray as they entered the local police station, a landmark building from the late 1800s. Though Riker’s own station house was also more than a century old, it was less grand. This one, disguised as an oversized townhouse, had been built to blend into a patch of the 19th Precinct that was filthy with millionaires. But the neighborhood had no flavor, no music. There might be some history to it; the detective did not know or care. No rockers had ever sung songs about this part of town, and that said it all for

Riker.

Sergeant Murray, not so vain as the SoHo detective, put on his bifocals, the better to study the small face on the poster. "I'll be damned. Nobody told us about any nun. . . . She looks just like Jonah." He led Riker up the stairs to the second floor, saying over one shoulder, "Tell you what we got. Cops downtown reported sightings of a blind kid tapping his way up a street with a white cane. They can place him in the East Village that morning. But we got other sightings in the Bronx and Queens."

"The East Village fits with Sister Michael," said Riker. "We know she bought flowers on St. Mark's Place around nine that morning."

"Well, this'll get us some leads." Sergeant Murray held up the poster for a second look. "What's up with those dicks at Missing Persons? We should've had a copy of this. The nun's even got the kid's smile."

"Shit happens."

The sergeant nodded to say, Amen, brother, and then he stopped by a closed door at the tops of the stairs. "We keep him in here."

The door opened by a few inches to give Riker a covert look at a civilian half his age, who sat at the far end of a conference table that was littered with paper cups and take-out cartons, pens and yellow pads. The young man's head was bowed, and his hands were clenched together in a white-knuckle prayer.

Murray kept his voice low, saying, "That's the kid's uncle, Harold Quill. He won't go home. Don't expect much, okay? The guy's punchy. No sleep since his nephew disappeared."

The lean, dark-haired Quill sported a stubble of beard, and the wrinkles in his expensive suit were also a few days in the making. When the detective and the sergeant entered the room, the man looked up with the eyes of the boy and the nun, large and gray and ringed with black lashes, but his had a vacant look of no one home. His skin was bloodless. And a puff of air might push him over, not that he would notice.

Riker had seen this before—what was left of a man when a child went missing.

After Sergeant Murray made the introductions, the detective sat down beside the distraught uncle. "So . . . you got a family connection to Angela Quill. Is that right?"

No response? Was this guy debating whether or not he should answer that simple question without legal advice? Rich people—could they even answer a damn phone without a lawyer?

"Angie's my sister," said Harold Quill. "She's a—"

"A nun, yeah. Was she meeting up with your nephew yesterday morning?"

"No! Why would you—" Quill covered his face with both hands, as if that could make a cop disappear, and he shook his head. "I drove Jonah to school. . . . He should've been in class."

"The nun's gone missing, too. My partner's downtown talkin' to your mother. Do you—"

"No!" Harold Quill grabbed Riker's arm, and the detective pretended not to notice that this man's fingernails were digging into him. "Promise me," said Quill, "promise you won't tell my mother where I live!"

* * *

Detective Mallory was Mrs. Quill's only visitor from the NYPD. Evidently, her son had failed to tell police that his kidnapped nephew had a grandmother on the Lower East Side. Less surprising, no one had even telephoned for a statement on the disappearance of her daughter, the nun. Most surprising? This woman had taken the dwindling of her family members quite well—as if one or two of them might vanish on a typical day.

"I called the prioress to tell her what I thought of my daughter for standing me up." In a lower voice, the mother muttered, "That bitch. That whore."

And would the nice detective like some tea?

Statuettes of saints cluttered every surface in this stuffy parlor that stank of scented, votive candles, the odor of cinnamon warring with rosemary and lavender. All the walls were lined with portraits of Jesus: a laughing Christ and a weeping one, but predominantly bloody, suffering Christs nailed up by hand and foot, and these images had set the tone of the interview with Mrs. Quill, whose mouth was forever frozen in the downturned arc of the righteous, whose eyes were way too wide and laser bright with the light of the Lord.

Mallory sat on the sofa, flipping through the family photograph album. Useless. Most of the faces pictured here had been scratched out, though not all of these erasures were done with the same tool. Some cuts were sharper than others. Beside her sat the scrawny matriarch of the family, dressed in a prim white nightgown. The loudmouthed crone guided the detective, page by page. And so Mallory discovered that images of the husband had been the first mutilations.

"May he rot in hell! He left me with three damn kids."

Next in the order of abandonment came the scratched-out face of a blond daughter.

"Gabriel. Gabby, we called her. She was fifteen when that picture was taken. That's when she ran away from me. A year later, she died giving birth to a bastard." Mrs. Quill said this with great satisfaction, as if that death might have been payback for a child born out of wedlock. The woman lowered her voice and leaned closer to share another happy confidence. "Gabby's son was born blind."

Even a more seasoned detective would have flinched. Mallory only looked down at one more photo of a faceless girl, and this one had dark hair.

"Oh, that's my Angie, the other goddamn whore." Mrs. Quill reached out one boney hand to turn to the next page, and there was the only unscarred picture of this daughter, a recent addition that had yet to be pasted in with album corners. Sister Michael was posed in the robes of a nun. "She redeemed herself . . . with the church." Sarcasm suggested that the nun had yet to be redeemed here at home.

Every picture of Mrs. Quill's son, Harold, had the face scratched out in the year he had sued her for custody of his nephew, Gabby's blind child. "Poor little Jonah. They stole him from me—Harry and that bitch social worker. By now, the boy's drowning in sin." A photograph of this child as a toddler, who had yet to commit any known sin against his grandmother, had survived the knife cuts of omission from the family.

Given more than a nodding acquaintance with Crazy, Mallory had to ask how this woman fancied chances for the survival of Sister Michael and Jonah. "Are they dead or alive?"

“Dead!” This firm vote revealed no guilt, but perhaps the opinion that a nun and a little boy could deserve to lose their lives. Then Mrs. Quill added, “Dead and gone to God,” a slightly better outcome, though offered up with less enthusiasm.

* * *

The walls were brick. The door was metal. The grownups were dead.

Jonah had stepped on their flung-out arms and legs while mapping this chilly room that was fifteen steps square. A queasy horror. And now the stink of them was dulled by clogs of snot brought on by the boy’s crying. He had found his aunt among the corpses.

By touch, he had recognized a long robe and veil, but he knew it was Aunt Angie by the smallest finger of her right hand, broken in her childhood and crooked out at the knuckle. Jonah had held this hand so many times. He could never mistake it for any other.

She had gone away when he was seven years old. For five years, he had waited for her in the fantasy of *She Comes Back*—and here she was.

He kissed her crooked finger.

High on the wall and beyond his reach, the loud motor started up again with the death rattle of an old machine, its parts clacking, broken or breaking down, but still churning out more blasts of cold air. Shivering, Jonah laid his body down beside his aunt. She gave him comfort—and warmth. Her wide robe was generous enough to cover him, too. “Thank you.”

Pieces of a day were missing. Or was it two days? His internal clock was broken. There was a rumble in his stomach, but the thought of food made him want to puke. Was his brain busted, too? Dumbed down? Only now he thought to wonder what had happened to him—to her.

How could she be dead?

Aunt Angie knew how to fight. On her way out of his life, she had taught him that fingernails could draw blood, thumbs could gouge out eyes, and a kick to the balls could put a man in a world of hurt. And then she had walked out the door to catch a bus to God’s house.

Had she known then what was coming—who was coming?

Her killer would never suspect him until it was too late. He could walk right up to that sick bastard and play helpless—just a kid, right?—and then nail him. Kill him? Yes! Beneath the blanket of the shared robe, Jonah’s fists made one-two punches. No fear. Aunt Angie was with him, keeping him warm, teaching him how to draw blood and bring on pain. His aunt’s side of this conversation was made up from saved-away memories of her, the sound of her, but all the words had the ring of true things. He knew what she would say to every—

The air conditioner shut down. Now a new sound. Metal on metal. A squeak to a door hinge. And the dead woman’s voice inside his head screamed, *That’s him!*

The boy shook off the robe and sat up.

Footsteps. Heavy ones. Aunt Angie sang out, Get ready!

Jonah was shaking and shot through with freaking cold, heart-a-banging panic.

The footsteps stopped a few paces into the room. Jonah rocked his body like a toddler with a wooden horse between his legs. The hard-soled shoes were crossing the floor, coming for him. They were here! Now the smell of cigarette breath. So close. Puffs of stinky air on his face.

Close enough! yelled Aunt Angie.

A man's deeper voice, a real one, said, "You can't see."

Jonah, get him!

Sorry, so sorry, but he could not do that. He was crazy scared. A small bottle of sloshing liquid was pressed into his hands—a reward for getting the rules right in a world where twelve-year-old boys were always outmatched by grown men. Sorry.

The bottled water tasted odd. No matter. So thirsty. Jonah drank it, gulped it down. All gone now. His rocking slowed—and stopped. His fear ebbed away, dulling down to nothing. Sleep was creeping up on him.

Behind him was the man's hard-sole step. Stepping over the other bodies? Light plops. Dull scrapes. A quick shuffle of shoes. The door opened and closed, shoes leaving and coming back again—and again. More steps and shuffles, rustles and—what?

No! Jonah shook his head, shaking off a mind-muddling fog.

He reached for Aunt Angie's hand. No, no, no—she was sliding away, leaving him. Her body was dragged across the floor faster than he could crawl after her. Not fair! He rose up on his knees, as much of a stand as he could manage, and his hands balled into fists. "Give her back!"

The door went BANG!

And the boy fell, toppling to one side. Sleep came on so fast. He never felt the pain of hard ground rushing up to meet him with a knock to the head that said, Goodnight!

Chapter 2

The trees of Carl Schurz Park gave cover to Gracie Mansion, the official residence of the mayor. In the small hours of the morning, an alarm had sounded, and now this eighteenth-century landmark and its adjoining wing were surrounded by sheets of plastic tied off on ten-foot poles. Above this curtain, only the upper half of the extension building could be seen by civilians on East End Avenue. They saw nothing of the more secluded yellow mansion that overlooked the channel waters of Hell Gate—and the corpses stacked up on the lawn.

Members of the hazmat team were visible through the cloudy plastic as they moved about in helmets and bulky white suits that were sealed to protect them against deadly gasses and flesh-eating viruses or come what may.

On the broad sidewalk across the street, their audience was sporting Sunday-best T-shirts, shorts and summer dresses. The atmosphere turned festive as the crowd applauded the first sighting of bright-colored umbrellas

attached to rolling carts. Food vendors had turned out to cater this new threat to public health and safety. Men in aprons hawked their wares along the roadbed, first servicing the front lines. Then hungry buyers at the rear sent their money forward, hand-to-hand, and bags of bagels and coffee were handed back to them.

Men and women in dark suits held up the IDs of Homeland Security, and they yelled at the civilians, ordering them to move on. Predictably, these federal agents were ignored. The menace implied by moon suits had scared off out-of-towners, but not blasé natives who always formed a crowd for the prospect of sudden death in New York City. And, dammit, it was time for brunch.

Behind the backs of the shouting agents, a cadre of uniformed police officers stood in a line down the center of the avenue, and they all wore smirks of We told you so, you stupid bastards. The NYPD knew how to do crowd control. And, clearly, the federal government did not.

Some civilians with curb-side views sat on canvas camp stools sold from a cart with merchandise that included paper fans and sun visors. Most of the crowd remained standing, growing restless as they watched the slow, blurry movements of the hazmat team. New York attitude was in the air, and it demanded, Hey, let's get on with the show!

* * *

Two detectives stood behind the gawkers. One wore an out-of-date suit that spoke well of him as a civil servant who lived within his means, though, truth be told, Riker hated shopping and had let it slide for years.

He gave his partner a gallant wave that said, Ladies first, so he could use tall Mallory as a wedge to move through this tightly packed mob. People tended to get out of her way, and not because they respected the badge or her tailored threads—or the running shoes that cost more than Riker's entire closet, shoes thrown in. The whole package said that she was somebody, but the Mallory effect on crowds was more than that. When she wanted to jangle a civilian—like right now—she dropped every pretense of being human and walked toward the poor bastard as if she meant to walk right through him, and this was all that was needed to inspire that man's wary backward dance.

Just a hint of crazy got a world of respect in this town, though there were detectives in the Special Crimes Unit who suspected that Kathy Mallory was not hinting. She might be the real deal. Riker believed she knew this and encouraged it in the same way that the clothes on her back flaunted the idea of a cop who might be dirty.

She liked her games. She played them well.

When they reached the street, Riker ignored the government suits—so as not to lose face with the cops on the line. He spoke to the uniform with the sergeant's stripe, "What's up, Murray? You got a body count?"

"Yeah, I seen four of 'em in there." The sergeant glanced at officers to his left and right, indicating that this was not a good time to thank him for a tip on a dead nun. "The security cameras are useless—blacked out with paintballs. But I know the perp was wearing NYPD blue last night. On the other side of the park, we found a cop knocked out cold and stripped down to his skivvies."

Mallory was distracted by an argument half a block away. It looked to be one-sided, no fists in play yet, but

getting there. Riker also watched this scene as a government agent, red in the face, rose off the balls of his feet, trying so hard to be taller. The fed was outsize by the man who set a Gladstone bag down on the sidewalk at his booted feet. Chief Medical Examiner Edward Slope ripped off his protective helmet and gloves. The doctor's anger was more dignified—and more effective. The flat of one raised hand silenced the younger, shorter man from Homeland Security. Now it was Dr. Slope's turn to vent, and the federal agent came down from his tiptoes.

“A scam.” Without hearing one clear word, Mallory had the gist of the ME's complaint. “Those moon suits are just for show, right?”

“That's my guess,” said Sergeant Murray. “What we got in there is weird, but it's got shit to do with germs or poison gas. I figure the mayor wanted to keep people outta the park . . . on a Sunday. Well, forget that.” With a nod toward the plastic curtain, he said, “So one of those clowns in there called out the hazmat team. Figured that'd scare 'em off.” He turned back to the bagel-noshing sidewalk crowd. “Do they look scared to you?”

Since diplomacy was not his partner's forte, Riker walked down the street to join the kiddy agent in charge of false alarms and circuses. The detective offered this youngster the carrot of being addressed as a grownup. “Look, pal, I know you got jerked around today, but don't go off on anybody else, okay? We need some leverage here. Just pack up the moon suits and go.”

“Somebody's gotta pay for dragging out the whole damn—”

“Me and my partner, we can make that happen. We can make the pack of 'em wish they'd never screwed with you.” In the hierarchy of New York City, this was a fairy tale, but the young agent seemed to like the story.

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