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Another mass shooting was over. The country had moved on. But inside one house in Oregon, a family was discovering the unending extent of a wound.



JABIN BOTSFORD/THE WASHINGTON POST

A survivor's life

BY ELI SASLOW IN ROSEBURG, ORE.

She approached her daughter just as the doctors and psychologists had suggested: calmly, deliberately, stepping on the carpet so the floorboards didn't squeak, picking her way around the wheelchair, the walker, the sagging balloons and wilted flowers. She held her arms out in

front where her daughter could see them. She announced her arrival so as not to surprise her. "It's just me, your mom," she said, and then she reached out to place a reassuring hand on her daughter's back, making sure to touch below the bullet wound and away from the incision.

With her puppy in her lap, Cheyenne Fitzgerald falls and sits in exhaustion after a long day of disregarding the advice of her physical therapist and trying to run errands. She had been the youngest person shot at Umpqua Community College.

‘We need help. That’s what I’m saying.’

“I was thinking, if you’re ready for it, maybe I’d make a quick run to the store,” said Bonnie Schaan, 52.

“Wait. For how long?” asked Cheyanne Fitzgerald, 16.

“Not long. Are you ready to be alone? I’m not sure.”

It had been 20 days since the last time Bonnie left Cheyanne by herself — 20 days since she was shot along with 15 others in a classroom at Umpqua Community College. Nine people were killed that day, adding to the hundreds of Americans who have died in mass shootings in recent years. And seven people were wounded but didn’t die,

joining the ever-expanding ranks of mass-shooting survivors. There are thousands of them. Fifty-eight gunshot survivors at the movie theater in Aurora, Colo. Three at the Washington Navy Yard. One at a church in Charleston, S.C. Nine in Colorado Springs. Twenty-one in San Bernardino, Calif. And seven more in Roseburg, Ore., where Cheyanne had been sent home from the hospital to a flea-infested rental with reinforced locks and curtains darkening the living room.

A doctor had given her a booklet called “Creating a Safe Space to Recover,” and Bonnie had taken a break from waitressing to become a full-time caregiver. She had turned a \$5 garage-sale recliner into Cheyanne’s hospital bed and posted a sign on their front door: “No loud noises! Please do *NOT* knock.” She had set her alarm for every four hours to bring Cheyanne her medicines and anything else that might make her feel safe again.

Here came more Percocet to numb the pain and anti-anxieties to ease her panic attacks. Here came her purple blanket, her new puppy and her condolence letter from President Obama. Here came the old Little League baseball bats she wanted nearby for protection and the rifle she had used to kill her first deer.

“I’m talking about five minutes,” Bonnie said. “We



A side table that Cheyanne keeps next to her recliner is covered with a therapeutic coloring book, a water bottle and some of her medicines.



PHOTOS BY JABIN BOTSFORD/THE WASHINGTON POST

TOP LEFT: Cheyanne has her temperature taken by a physical therapist. TOP RIGHT: Bonnie Schaan cries as she calls friends and family while trying to figure out if her daughter will ever be okay. ABOVE: Bonnie hugs her older son, Jessy, after finding out a family friend died earlier that day. Behind them, Cheyanne brings her dog outside.

need juice and ice.”

“Fine. Go,” Cheyanne said.

She had been the youngest one shot on just her fourth day of college, and she was also one of the survivors in the worst shape: Lung punctured. Kidney pierced. Ribs cracked. Nerves compressed. Stomach stapled. Abdominals torn. She couldn’t yet sleep flat in bed, or walk unassisted, or do

much of anything beyond lie in the recliner on her left side. “Very lucky, considering,” was what she had been told by one trauma medic, who specialized in treating soldiers after combat. But Cheyanne had signed up for Writing 115, not a war, and the idea of luck hadn’t occurred to her yet.

“Do you want me to call someone to come sit with you?” Bonnie asked.

“No. Jesus. I can take care of myself.”

“Blinds opened or closed?”

“Damn it, Mom. Just go!”

Bonnie grabbed her coat and opened the door. She could see the market across the street.

“You’ll be okay?” she asked, but Cheyanne didn’t answer.

This, she was realizing more and more, was the role of a survivor in a mass shooting: to be okay, to get better, to exemplify resilience for a country always rushing to heal and continue on. There had been a public vigil during her surgery, a news conference when she was upgraded from critical to stable and then a small celebration when she was sent home after two weeks with handmade card signed by the hospital staff. “Strong and Moving On,” it had read.

By then, the college had reopened. What remained of her Writing 115 class had been moved across campus to an airy art building with windows that looked out on Douglas firs. They were forging ahead and coming back stronger, always stronger. That’s what the college dean had said.

Except inside the rental, where every day was just like the one before: awake again in the recliner. Asleep again in the recliner. Cheyanne dressed in the same baggy pajamas that hung loose and away from her wounds. She was wrapped in an abdominal binder that helped hold her major organs in place. Her hair was greasy because her injuries made it painful to take

a bath. Five medications sat on the coffee table, next to a bucket she reached for when those medicines made her throw up. She couldn’t go back to school, or play her guitar, or drive her truck, or hold a long conversation without losing her breath, so she mostly sat in silence and thought about the same seven minutes everyone else was so purposefully moving past. The shooter was standing over her. The hollow-point bullet was burning through her upper back.

She wanted to talk about it. She needed to tell someone who knew her — someone other than a psychologist — what she’d been thinking ever since that day: “I just lied there. I didn’t save anybody. I couldn’t even get up off the ground.” But what everyone else around her seemed to want was for the shooting to be over and for her to be better, so they came to urge her along at all hours of the day and night.

In came the assistant district attorney with a bouquet of flowers and a check for \$7,200 in victim restitution. “On to better days,” he said.

In came her best friend, Savannah, with a special anti-stress coloring book. “For your nightmares,” she said.

In came Bonnie, always Bonnie, rushing between the kitchen and the living room, her eyes bloodshot from sleep deprivation and hands shaking from a heart condition. “Think positive. Think positive,” she said, because a therapist had suggested that as a mantra.

In came one of her brothers, Raimey, 24. “Can I get you something?” he asked.

And then in came her other brother, Jessy, carrying two large boxes and handing one to her. "A present," he said. "Open it." She lifted the lid and reached inside, removing what looked like a small gun.

She had owned guns since she was 6, when her father had given her a hot-pink youth model .22 for Christmas. She'd killed her first deer at 12 and another two years later. "A gun person all the way," she had said of herself, and now she was fingering the trigger of what was not a real gun but a replica, a self-defense weapon designed to shoot lasers and pepper spray. Her palm found the barrel. Her index finger found the trigger.

"It's got a nice feel to it, right?" Jessy said, as Cheyeanne began to think about the last time she had been this close to a gun.

"It's small enough you could put it in your purse for school," Jessy said, and suddenly Cheyeanne was smelling salt, metal and blood. It had smelled nothing like deer.

"Do you want me to set it up for you?" Jessy asked, and Cheyeanne shook her head. She put the weapon back in the box. "Not yet. Thanks."

They turned the TV to an old Western. It got dark, and Jessy left. "Do you want to watch something else?" Bonnie asked, but Cheyeanne wasn't paying attention. She was still thinking about the school. She had told the story of those seven minutes only once, to the psychologist from Veterans Affairs while Bonnie sat nearby, and before Cheyeanne had finished Bonnie's

pacemaker had started acting up. "This is too hard for me to hear," she had said, and then she had gone outside to feed their hens. Now Cheyeanne decided to try again.

"The thing I keep thinking about is how that bastard stepped on me," she said.

Bonnie shifted on the couch. She flicked dust off the armrest. She noticed a dirty plate on Cheyeanne's bedside table and reached over to grab it.

"Like I wasn't even human," Cheyeanne said. "Like I was nothing."

Bonnie stood up. "Can I get you something? Maybe some juice?" She walked into the kitchen before Cheyeanne could answer and filled a glass. She could feel her heart trying to accelerate and the pacemaker working in her chest. She reached into the freezer to add ice cubes to Cheyeanne's drink, but the bag had frozen into one gigantic mass. She called out to Cheyeanne in the living room. "I'm going to break apart some ice," she said. "You're going to hear a few loud bangs."

"How many bangs?" Cheyeanne asked. Bonnie lifted the bag up over her head. "One or two," she said. She dropped it onto the counter. Bang. She lifted it again. Bang.

Cheyeanne covered her ears. She grimaced and stared at her phone.

Bang.

Her eyes went wide. "What the hell was that?" she screamed. "What was the third bang?"

"It's still stuck together," Bonnie said. "Get ready for another."

Bang.

“Jesus. How many more?”

Bang, bang, and by the time Bonnie returned to the living room, Cheyenne had lifted her legs into her chest and pulled the blanket up to her head.

“Somebody get me the hell out of here,” Cheyenne was saying one afternoon. “I don’t even care where I go. I just need to leave.”

Bonnie brought Cheyenne an outfit. She helped tie her shoes. She loaded the walker and the wheelchair into the car. She cushioned the passenger seat with pillows so Cheyenne could lie down on her side. She put a baseball bat within reach behind the seat. Then off they went for drive-through coffees.

Bonnie had always considered Cheyenne, her third and final child, to be the most capable member of their family — its true “independent adult,” she said. Raimey was awaiting a court date on a drug charge, and Jessy had also fought addiction before getting a good job and steadying his life. Cheyenne was the one who stayed away from drugs, who helped track the family finances, who cared for their pets, who figured out how to fix her own truck, who was always in a hurry to grow up and move away. She had dropped out of high school midway through her

sophomore year, scored well on her GED and then enrolled in community college — the first in her family to go. On the second day of class she had decided she wanted to become a nurse. On the third day she had said maybe neonatal. On the fourth day she had shown up early for Writing 115 and came home utterly dependent.

They drove under a billboard that read “UCC Strong,” past a banner that said “Roseburg Will Prevail” and up to a coffee shop with a sign posted on the window: “Ten percent of proceeds go to victims!”

“I actually was a victim,” Cheyenne told the girl at the counter, after she’d ordered her drink.

“Of what?” the girl asked.

Cheyenne pointed to the sign.

“Oh. No kidding?” the girl said. She smiled. She handed out the drink. “Straw?” she asked.

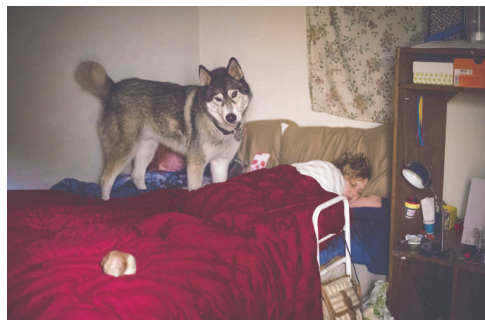


Cheyenne unboxes a couple of knives she just bought in a Walmart. She likes to have knives with her at all times as she often fears for her safety.



PHOTOS BY JABIN BOTSFORD/THE WASHINGTON POST

ABOVE: Cheyenne storms inside the house, screaming and hitting her mother after an argument. She had been angry since the shooting, and sometimes the anger even surprised her. **BOTTOM LEFT:** Cheyenne grabs the wall as she briefly loses her balance after a long day of walking around. **BOTTOM RIGHT:** Cheyenne tries to sleep as her dog, Sounder, stands guard.



On Cheyenne's only other trip out of the house since coming home, she had tried going to the mall with friends who offered to push her wheelchair, and she had ended up back in the hospital, dehydrated and running a fever. But now she was feeling good and wanted to stay out. "I need a new sweatshirt," she said, because she

had lost 20 pounds since the surgery and none of her clothes fit. Bonnie drove Cheyenne to a store she liked and lifted the wheelchair from the trunk. She rolled Cheyenne toward the entrance, but it was an old store with no ramp. She tried to lift up the chair over the curb and fell just short. The metal frame banged back against her

ankle, and the wheel slammed down on her foot. "What was that?" Cheyeanne asked. "Nothing," Bonnie answered, as a welt rose up on her leg. She gritted her teeth and lifted the chair over the curb again. They waited at the door for someone to open it. They wheeled circles through tight clothing racks. The women's sweatshirts were upstairs. The store had no escalator or elevator.

"Screw this," Cheyeanne said, climbing out of the chair, starting up the stairs on foot.

"What are you doing?" Bonnie said, chasing after her.

"I'm fine," Cheyeanne said, but now she was halfway up and out of breath. Her right leg buckled. She leaned hard on the railing.

"You can't do this," Bonnie said.

"Stop telling me what to do!" Cheyeanne said, and now she was at the top of the stairs, where there were no women's sweatshirts either. "Are you *kidding* me?" she said. Her legs began to wobble. She wheezed and gasped for air. Her chest expanded and her ribs throbbed. She turned around, went back downstairs and collapsed into the chair.

"Get me out of here," she demanded, and Bonnie hurried over to push the wheelchair.

"Move!" Cheyeanne said, and Bonnie searched for a path back through the racks.

"Jesus! Are you this stupid? Can't you do anything right?" Cheyeanne shouted, as Bonnie tried to navigate the curb again,

her body buckling under the weight of a 16-year-old girl and a 50-pound wheelchair, its frame slamming back into her ankle.

"Hey, I'm a waitress, not a nurse," Bonnie said. "Quit giving me alligator ass. I'm trying."

She loaded Cheyeanne back into the car and started to fold the wheelchair so it would fit in the trunk. She pushed the sides together, but the chair wouldn't fold. She tried again and nothing happened.

"Are you serious?" Cheyeanne said, watching her. "How many times until you figure this out? Lift and *then* pull. Lift and *then* pull. How hard is that?"

"Okay. Thanks," Bonnie said. She stepped back and studied the chair. Think positive, she thought to herself. She pulled and then lifted. The chair didn't move.

Cheyeanne stepped out of the car. She stumbled and caught herself on the door. She pushed Bonnie away and reached for the wheelchair.

"Stop. I'll do it," she said. "Apparently you're too stupid to figure it out."

She knew how she could sound in those moments. "Sorry, Mom," she would eventually say after each outburst, but another always came. The fact was it felt good to be angry, to yell and curse, because if she wasn't angry then she was mostly afraid: of nightmares, of being alone, of the shadows in the church parking lot across the street, of cars backfiring, of the sound of knocking coming now at the door. "What



PHOTOS BY JABIN BOTSFORD/THE WASHINGTON POST

TOP LEFT: Cheyanne looks at new wigs for fun at Merle Norman Cosmetics downtown. TOP RIGHT: Cheyanne takes a selfie with her boyfriend, Dan Talbert, during her birthday party at Abby's Legendary Pizza. ABOVE: Cheyanne cries at Mercy Medical Center after checking herself back into the hospital with continued pain from the gunshot wound.

the hell is that?" she said, twisting deeper into the recliner, covering her ears.

It was Dustin, one of her brother Raimey's friends. "Oh, hey, Chy," he said. He looked her over, taking account of her injuries. "Would it be okay if I asked you some questions about it? I'm kind of curious."

"Yeah," she said. "That would be good."

"Okay," he said. "I'll be right back."

She sat in the recliner and waited. Maybe she couldn't get her mother to listen to what had happened in the classroom, but Dustin wanted to know. Other than the psychologist, only one person had asked her about it directly, a hospital nurse who wondered what it felt like to get shot.

Everyone else had come with balloons and greeting cards with slogans about courage and perseverance without ever asking how, exactly, she had persevered or if, in fact, she had been courageous. Dustin would ask. She would tell him.

She adjusted her heating pad and took a Percocet. Dustin went into Raimey's bedroom and locked the door. He came back out and walked past her to the porch. She watched him smoke a cigarette and dance to music nobody else could hear. She watched him go back to her brother's bedroom, this time for more than an hour. She took a second Percocet. She practiced standing up from the chair with the support of her walker and then sitting back down, just as the physical therapist had taught her. Dustin came back into the living room, this time wearing headphones. He pulled at the fuzz on his socks.

"Mom, I'm starving," Cheyenne said. Her right leg had gone numb. Her side ached. "Why isn't there any food in this house?" she said. "I want Chinese."

"Okay, honey," Bonnie said, and since Raimey and Dustin were there and Cheyenne wouldn't have to be alone, Bonnie got in her car and drove to a takeout restaurant. Sunlight flooded the truck. She rolled down the window. "Air," she said.

A few weeks earlier, when Cheyenne was still in the hospital, Bonnie had gone out for a drive and found herself retracing Cheyenne's path on the morning of the shooting: onto the freeway, up toward the UCC campus on the north side of

Roseburg, and then stopping at a market where she knew Cheyenne had stopped to buy drinks. Bonnie had asked the clerk if he remembered Cheyenne, and when he said he wasn't sure she asked if he had surveillance footage from that day. The clerk had found the tape and played it for her, and Bonnie had watched as her daughter walked onto the screen. She was carrying three energy drinks. She was walking without a limp. She was smiling at the clerk, thanking him, waving, laughing at a joke, and then walking back toward her truck. She was going to college. She was going to become a nurse. She had called Bonnie a few minutes later: "Love you as big as the roads," she had said, which was something they had always said to each other. "Can we watch the tape again?" Bonnie had asked the clerk, and after the third time through he had offered to make her a copy.

Now she picked up the Chinese and drove it home to Cheyenne. The chicken was too spicy for her. The rice wasn't as sticky as she liked it.

"I lost my appetite," she said. "Get this stuff away from me."

They sat together in the living room and looked at their phones. The dog was whimpering. The plumbing had broken and now sewage was coming up on their front lawn. Bonnie turned on the TV as Dustin emerged again from Raimey's room. It had been eight hours since he had told Cheyenne he wanted to hear about the shooting. "Are we going to talk or what?" Cheyenne asked him. He stared back at

her blankly. He shrugged his shoulders. She watched him go back to her brother's room for another hour. She watched him come out again and eat her leftover Chinese.

"Dustin has to leave," Cheyenne told Bonnie. "He's bothering me."

"Get out of here," Bonnie told Dustin, throwing him \$10 for a cab.

He said he was hoping to spend the night. He said he didn't have anywhere to go. "I never got to ask my questions," he told Cheyenne, but now she didn't want to talk to him anyway because it was getting dark and soon she would be trying to sleep. "I can't talk about this right before bed," she said.

She had been sleeping in the same room as Bonnie and awakening in the night to sore ribs, to nausea, to nightmares. She had dreamed the night before about shopping for a car with her father, who lived across town. They had found a used truck, and Cheyenne was about to use her victim compensation money to make the purchase when a gunman barged into the dealership. "Don't shoot!" Cheyenne had shouted, and for some reason the gunman had nodded and then turned. He had pointed the gun instead at her father and fired.

She had so many reasons to be afraid, to be angry. Meanwhile, Bonnie could feel the battery running low inside her fourth pacemaker, and what she needed most of all was to stay calm. She took her

Valium. She scheduled an extra visit with her heart doctor. She repeated her mantra. She worked to memorize the names of Cheyenne's 11 new doctors, and when she continued to forget she wrote them down on her hand.

She had spent much of her life dealing with crisis: pregnant at 17, an abusive relationship, eight heart surgeries, jail for one son and addiction for the other. She wore a locket around her neck that Jessy had given to her: "A mother understands what a child never has to say," it read, and somehow Bonnie had known what to do on the morning of the shooting, too. "Where are you?" she had texted Cheyenne in those first minutes. "ANSWER!" she had texted again. And then even though UCC was directing all parents to meet at the fairgrounds, Bonnie had driven instead to the local emergency room. She had arrived just in time to see a stretcher rolling by into surgery, and on that stretcher was Cheyenne — blood caked into her hair, clothes cut off, a medic asking her to repeat her birthdate in an attempt to keep her awake.

Bonnie had spent the past weeks trying to forget those images. She'd left Cheyenne's clothes from that day untouched in a bag in her car that she was too afraid to open or even carry inside. She knew her daughter needed to talk about the shooting, but she didn't think she could deal with hearing it. "It's pure evil, and it gives me the shakes," Bonnie had told her own doctor. It was hard enough for her to sit through Cheyenne's medical consults and hear her

daughter discussed in clinical terms, each appointment bringing a new revelation about what recovery would require.

Her right leg was buckling because of damage to her sciatic nerve, the physical therapist said.

Her anger and insomnia suggested a possible anxiety disorder, a psychologist said.

Her high pulse needed to be examined by a specialist, the home nurse said.

A small piece of the bullet was still embedded in her rib, where it would remain, the urologist said.

“Positive thinking leads to positive results,” Bonnie said to Cheyenne as they prepared to leave for one of the five doctor appointments they had scheduled for a single day. This one was at the hospital for a follow-up with the surgeon. Bonnie readied the wheelchair. She helped Cheyenne zip her boots. She drove them to the hospital and they met with the surgeon, who took X-rays and noticed more fluid building in her lungs. “Something to watch,” he said, explaining that she would need to come back for another follow-up. If there was still fluid, they would go in and drain it.

Bonnie pushed Cheyenne back toward the office lobby, and she banged the side of the wheelchair against the frame of the door. “You idiot. You’re unbelievable,” Cheyenne said, taking control of the chair with her arms, wheeling herself toward the exit. Bonnie stopped at the front desk, and the receptionist handed her paperwork. “How about you don’t spell my name

wrong this time, okay?” Cheyenne said. She sat in her wheelchair and tapped her foot against the floor. “Jesus. Hurry up,” she said a minute later. “Do you need me to do it for you?”

“I think she’s doing just fine, thanks,” the receptionist said, glaring at Cheyenne.

“Screw this. I’m going downstairs,” Cheyenne said. She wheeled to the door, kicked it open and disappeared into the hall.

Bonnie looked up at the receptionist and smiled. “Sorry about us,” she said.

“I know she has a right to be angry, but are you okay?” the receptionist asked.

“Yeah. I am,” Bonnie said, but she set the paperwork on the counter and started to shake her head.

“Yeah. I really am,” she said again, but now her hands were shaking and she was beginning to cry. The receptionist reached over to touch her arm. “What’s going on?” she said, and since no one else had asked, Bonnie began to explain what her life had become. The tiptoeing. The whispering. The alligator ass. The cursing. The panic attacks. The baseball bats in the living room and the guns in the bedroom. The way Cheyenne would twitch and grimace and then cry out for her in the night, reaching for her hand, asking her to stay close, until the night ended and the sun rose and Cheyenne cursed and pushed her away.

“She didn’t used to be like this,” Bonnie said. “Every day just rolls into the next day, and none of them get better. I’m not seeing my daughter anywhere. Does that

make sense? Is that crazy?"

"No. That's not crazy," the receptionist said, and she started to say something more, but Bonnie interrupted.

"I don't know what I'm supposed to do," she said. "I'm a waitress, okay? I don't know where I'm supposed to draw the line with her and what will make her better or what will make her worse. She's scared. She's angry. She doesn't listen. Everybody is moving on, and we're supposed to be getting back to normal and I think she's getting worse. We need help. That's what I'm saying. We need help right now, because I don't know what she's going to do. I can't take this much longer. My heart — okay? I run on batteries — okay? We're coming right up to the edge."

Her cellphone started to ring. It was Cheyenne. She took a deep breath and answered. "Hi, Chy-Chy," she said. On the other end of the line there was muffled yelling. Bonnie held up the phone so the receptionist could hear. She pressed the phone back to her ear. "I know, Chy. I'm sorry. You're right. I'm coming. I'll be right there."

Bonnie put the phone back in her purse and thanked the receptionist. "I have to go," she said, and the receptionist handed her a number for a psychologist, in case she wanted to call. Bonnie hurried out to the hall, where she caught her reflection on the elevator door. Her makeup was smudged. Her eyes were bloodshot. "I can't let her see me like this," Bonnie said, so she went into the bathroom to clean up. She took the ele-

vator downstairs and saw her daughter sitting in her wheelchair — bullet in her rib, back hunched, fists clenched, fluid building in her lungs. "Think positive," Bonnie thought to herself. She walked over and put her hand on Cheyenne's back, just below the bullet wound, just away from the incision. "I'm here," she said.

"What took you so long?" Cheyenne said. "Is there something wrong?"

"No, it's just that you know me with paperwork," Bonnie said, laughing at herself, wheeling Cheyenne out the door. "I didn't understand some of the questions. I'm a little bit slow."

"Yeah," Cheyenne said. "No shit."

"Bastard shot me in the back."

Cheyenne was trying again. It was the same detail she had told her mother, but this time she was saying it to Raimey as he walked by her in the living room. If it couldn't be Bonnie, or Dustin, or anyone else in a town that was moving on, then maybe Raimey would stop for a minute and listen. He had headphones in his ears. "Hey, sis," he said.

"He shot me in the back," she said again.

Raimey slowed down and pulled out one of his ear buds. "Can I get you something?" he asked. He started to walk away into the kitchen.

"No. Jesus," she said. "Sit down, will you?"

Raimey came back into the room and leaned against the armrest of the couch. He

took out his ear buds. "What's up?" he said.

"When you see me sitting here, I'm always thinking about the same thing," she said, and then when he didn't get up she began to tell him about her writing class: 35 or so people. And her seat: "back right corner, furthest from the door." And her teacher: a man in his late 60s who had just distributed a handout when they heard two deafening bangs. A young man Cheyenne didn't recognize came through the classroom door carrying a backpack and two handguns. "I've been waiting for this," he said, and before Cheyenne could make sense of what he meant or what was happening, he had walked to within a few feet of the teacher, pointed the gun and pulled the trigger. "One shot and then blood," Cheyenne said.

"Jesus," Raimey said, putting down his remote-controlled car, sliding off the armrest onto the couch.

"He was almost casual about it," Cheyenne said, describing how the shooter had ordered the students to gather in the center of the room. She began to tell Raimey how she had huddled next to her friend, Ana, and how she had watched from the floor as the gunman shot a woman pleading in her wheelchair, and then a man who said, "I'm so sorry for whatever happened that made you this way," and then a woman who tipped over her desk and ducked for cover. He had kept going into his backpack to reload. Cheyenne had stayed on the ground as blood pooled closer, and then as footsteps came closer, too. She had reached

for Ana's hand. She had felt that hand flinch when Ana got shot. She had heard the shooter move above her and then felt the burn of the bullet and wetness on her back. She had closed her eyes and wished for shock, but it had never come.

"What's your religion?" the shooter had asked, once it was clear she was still alive, and she had told him that she didn't know, that she was 16 and needed time to figure it out. "I don't want to die," she said, and for some reason he had given her a chance. "Get up and I'll shoot somebody else," he said. She tried to push herself off the floor, but her leg wouldn't move. "Get up," he said, but this time he was standing on her arm, pinning her down. "Get up," he said again, but all she could do was lie there next to her injured friend and wait for the next bullet. She knew it was coming. Any second now. But instead what came were sounds at the classroom door, and the shooter ran over to look. Then there were voices down the hall, and more gunshots, and then the shooter was back into the classroom and pointing the gun at his head, pulling the trigger.

"That's when I got hysterical," she told Raimey now. "I was coughing and spitting up all this blood. I basically knew I was going to die."

"Oh, man. Chy," Raimey said. He sat on the couch and looked over at her. She had her baseball bats nearby, her pink hunting knife, her replica gun. He had accused her once of exaggerating her trauma to take advantage of Bonnie's sympathy. "Milking

it,” he had said then. Now he wasn’t sure what to tell her. “I’m sorry,” he said, finally. “I had no idea you were strong like that.”

She looked back at him. She adjusted her blanket.

“I wasn’t strong. That’s the thing,” she said. “I couldn’t even get up. I just laid there, like nothing.”

She leaned her head back against the recliner and closed her eyes. She was still in her pajamas and the binder was wrapped tightly around her waist. Her ribs ached, so she twisted over onto her side. “Ugh. Just make it stop,” she said. Raimey stood from the couch and came over to her chair. He reached down to grab the puppy and set it in her lap. “What do you need?” he asked. “What can I get you?”

“Nothing,” she said, and now the anger was gone and her voice was quiet. She had said it. She had finally told someone, and wasn’t that supposed to be progress in the life of a survivor? Wasn’t that resilience, recovery, moving on? Then how come she still felt anything but okay? She grabbed her blanket and pulled it up to her neck. She took out her coloring book and started filling in a dragon. Bonnie came in offering sushi, offering pizza, offering a frozen coffee drink.

Bang.

“What was that,” Cheyenne said, sitting back up in the chair. Bang, bang. Somebody was knocking at the door. It was Dustin. “Oh, sorry. No knocking,” he said, letting himself in.

“Ugh, you scared me,” Cheyenne said. Outside it was getting dark. The streetlamp was casting shadows against the house and headlights from the road reflected off their window. She pulled the blanket up a little higher and returned to her coloring book.

Bang, bang. More knocking.

“Jesus,” Cheyenne said, twisting onto her side, clutching at her chest. It was Raimey’s girlfriend. “Sorry, Chy,” she said.

Bang. Cheyenne covered her ears. “What the hell?” she screamed. It was Dustin again. “Whoops,” he said.

“I can’t breathe,” Cheyenne said, and Bonnie rushed in with water. She opened up the shades and Cheyenne looked out the window, where now she could see somebody wandering in the parking lot of the church across the street. It was just another one of Raimey’s friends, but Cheyenne didn’t recognize him. All she could see was that he was young. He was tall. He was holding something in his hand. A handbag? A backpack? “Who’s that?” she asked, squeezing the armrests of her recliner. “What does he want? Where is he going?”

He was on their lawn.

He was at the porch.

He was coming toward the door.

“Stop!” Cheyenne said. He was knocking, knocking, knocking.

“Mom!” she cried, forcing herself up from the recliner. “Mom, help! Please. I need you.”

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