



Finding Cassie

ANNA JACOBS

Allison & Busby Limited
11 Wardour Mews
London W1F 8AN
allisonandbusby.com

First published in Great Britain by Allison & Busby in 2020.

Copyright © 2020 by ANNA JACOBS

The moral right of the author is hereby asserted in accordance with
the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

*All characters and events in this publication,
other than those clearly in the public domain,
are fictitious and any resemblance to actual persons,
living or dead, is purely coincidental.*

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced,
stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by
any means without the prior written permission of the publisher,
nor be otherwise circulated in any form of binding or cover
other than that in which it is published and without a similar
condition being imposed on the subsequent buyer.

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from
the British Library.

First Edition

ISBN 978-0-7490-2380-5

Typeset in 11/16 pt Sabon LT Pro by
Allison & Busby Ltd

The paper used for this Allison & Busby publication
has been produced from trees that have been legally sourced
from well-managed and credibly certified forests.

Printed and bound by
CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon, CR0 4YY

Chapter One

Cassandra Bennington held out the mic so that the woman she was interviewing could give her answer. Then a deafening noise tore the world apart and everything went into slow motion as darkness swallowed her.

When she recovered consciousness, she was in an ambulance that was moving fast with its siren blaring.

A man said, ‘She’s coming to.’ A blurry figure leant closer. ‘You’ve been hurt but not badly, and you’re on your way to hospital.’

She tried to understand how she’d got hurt but couldn’t make sense of it. ‘What happened? Was it – heart attack?’

When he didn’t answer, she made a huge effort to bring him into focus. ‘Please. Tell me.’

‘Someone planted a bomb in the building you were in. It went off and wreaked havoc. You were lucky you weren’t closer to it.’

She stared up at him in shock. ‘Why would anyone do that? It was only a block of flats.’

‘Who knows why, love? We just pick up the pieces as best we can.’

The ambulance turned sharply to the left and came to a halt.

‘We’re at the hospital now. Let’s get you to a doctor and make sure you’re all right. Worry about other things later. You’re alive and in one piece. That’s what matters.’ He patted her hand and started to move away.

‘Wait!’

He half turned.

‘What about the woman I was interviewing?’

‘They were getting someone else out from nearby as we left. I’m not sure who, but if you survived, she probably did too.’

The woman had been so young – and very pregnant.

As they slid her out of the ambulance and jolted her into the brightly lit building, Cassie heard the paramedic say something in a low voice, then she heard the vehicle drive away, siren blaring again. She was wheeled into a cubicle in the casualty department and someone drew flimsy curtains on a hostile world.

She felt lethargic, utterly boneless, let them do what they wanted. She tried to answer their questions, not sure she was making much sense. She didn’t want to talk, wanted to hide in some deep, dark cave and lie quietly, but they kept prodding her and moving her about.

After they’d made sure no bones were broken, they tended to a gash on her shoulder that needed holding together with butterfly strips, then dealt with a few minor scratches and scrapes.

‘We’re going to need all our beds for the serious cases,

so you can go home in an hour's time – well, you can if someone comes to fetch you and promises to keep an eye on you tonight. Give the attendant your details when she comes round and tell her who to call.'

'Can I ask about the woman I was with?'

'Look, love—'

'She was pregnant. I can't bear to think of her being killed.' Cassie gave the woman's name and added, 'Please.'

'I'll have a quick look, see if she's been brought in.'

A couple of minutes later, the nurse returned. 'She's all right, just minor injuries. Is she a friend of yours?'

'No. I was interviewing her.'

He stared at her and said, 'Oh my goodness! You're Cassandra Benn, aren't you?'

'Yes. But please can you use my full surname on your records. I try to keep my private life out of the limelight as much as possible.'

'I won't tell anyone else here who you are, if that's what you want, but some of them will probably recognise you. I've seen you on TV. You do brilliant interviews, really incisive.'

'Thank you. Did they bring my backpack in with me? It's dark blue, only a small one. It's got a big white P painted on the back.'

'There's a pile of possessions been brought in with the injured and dumped in reception. I'll go and have a quick check.'

To her shuddering relief, someone had brought her backpack to the hospital, though she had to identify its contents before the nurse would give it to her. She sighed in relief as he stood it beside the bed because she'd have been

lost without it. It was dusty but when she looked inside, the contents seemed untouched.

‘Now you’ve got your own phone, can you call a friend to pick you up, Ms Bennington, and can you—’ Yet another ambulance siren sounded outside. ‘Sorry. I have to go. Please try to rest.’ The nurse hurried away.

How many people had been hurt, for heaven’s sake? she wondered. The ambulances seemed to be coming in one after the other.

Someone outside the entrance shouted for a crash team to come at once and she shuddered. She’d never been quite so close to being killed before, and mentally blessed whatever fate or blind chance had saved her. She should be out there reporting the incident, but couldn’t summon up the strength, just couldn’t do it. Not this time.

For a while, not wanting to take the nurses away from people whose injuries were worse than hers, she tried to obey orders and rest, she really did. But she couldn’t manage it lying on such an uncomfortable, shelf-like bed with all that bustle and noise just the other side of a flimsy curtain.

At least she was recovering, could feel her mind slowly coming back into clearer focus. Only, that was a double-edged sword because she had nothing to do with her thoughts except worry.

She noticed her watch on a stand next to the bed and put it on. It had a big, clear dial and seemed to be working still. It ought to be. It had been expensive, not bought to be pretty but because the brand was famed for the accuracy and toughness of its watches.

A quarter of an hour crawled slowly past, only two or

three minutes gone by each time she looked. By then she felt so frustrated she swung round on the narrow bed and sat upright on the edge, swinging her feet.

That soon palled and she stood up tentatively, relieved not to feel dizzy. Staying here was silly. She was all right now, should get out of their way.

She winced as a man screamed hoarsely nearby.

A woman stumbled past her cubicle, weeping. Cassie could only see her feet, but she could hear the anguish in the tears all too clearly.

She couldn't do this any longer. Dragging off the gown, she put her outer clothes on again, grimacing at the mess they were in. It felt better to be fully covered on this chilly summer day, as if she'd taken control of herself again.

She sat down and waited, but ten more minutes crawled past and no one came to see her. 'Oh, to hell with it!' She stood up and grabbed the backpack, pushing aside the curtain at the front of her cubicle.

As she was moving through the reception area the same nurse spotted her and hurried across. 'You haven't been discharged yet, Ms Bennington. Please go and lie down again. Doctor will come back to you as soon as she can. She needs to check that you're fit to leave.'

'I feel a lot better, honestly. I'd rather go home now. I can't rest here.'

'Have you asked a friend to pick you up?'

'No. I'll catch a taxi.' It was how she mostly got about in London.

'You should—Oh, just a minute. Stay there.' He turned away to help with a woman who had walked into the

busy area cradling her arm as if it hurt, followed by a man carrying a small child with a bloody leg.

Cassie took the opportunity to hurry towards the exit. She was in luck. A taxi was just dropping someone off and the driver was happy to take another fare.

She felt guilty for treating the hospital staff like that, but she had to get home, simply had to. She needed peace and quiet to recover.

She had never expected to be personally involved in a serious accident, let alone a terrorist incident even though she'd faced all sorts of risky interview situations. Did anyone expect such lunatic behaviour to touch their lives? Not unless they were in a combat zone.

As she sat in the taxi, it upset her that she hadn't known who to call for help. She had plenty of acquaintances but who could she consider a close enough friend to come to her aid? No one these days. And that upset her.

Since she and Brett had split up, she seemed to have lost contact with so many people. Or they'd lost contact with her. She'd been working hard, burying her upset about him leaving her by concentrating on other people's stories.

The taxi driver opened the rear door and it was a few moments before she realised they'd arrived.

'You all right, love?'

'Yes. Thanks.' She got out her credit card and paid him.

Once inside the house, she closed the front door and leant against it, whimpering because she hadn't realised that she wouldn't feel safe even here.

Another thing she hadn't expected.

It took her a few minutes to decide to go to bed. They'd

told her to rest, hadn't they? She'd feel better if she did that – surely she would?

It took her a while to get to sleep but she welcomed the drowsiness.

She jerked awake a few hours later as someone rang her doorbell, then hammered on the front door. It was dark outside now and the street light shining into her bedroom made everything look surreal. By the time she'd remembered why she was feeling so groggy, the front door had opened and the person had come in.

She tensed and looked for something to protect herself with, then heard Brett call her name and relaxed.

The last person she wanted to see her like this was her ex.

He came upstairs calling her name again and stopped in the doorway of her bedroom, switching on the light.

She shaded her eyes against the glare and wished he'd stop staring.

'Thank goodness you're safe, Cassie!'

She wasn't ready to forgive him. 'Who told you to come barging in?'

'It was on the news.'

'What was?'

'The bombing. They said you were amongst the injured.'

'Oh.' Her stomach lurched at the memory of how helpless and bewildered she'd felt lying in the hospital – how out of touch, too.

'I wouldn't have walked in like that, Cassie, but I was worried sick about you. The nurse at the hospital said you'd discharged yourself, so I rang round our friends but

no one had heard from you. And they hadn't heard from you for a while.'

'No. I've been . . . busy.' She felt at a disadvantage sitting on the edge of the bed, so got up, wincing as her bruised and battered body protested.

He came across to steady her and she let him, which wasn't like her.

He walked down the stairs in front of her, and to make matters worse she was glad when he did that, because she felt distinctly wobbly.

'Why don't you sit in your recliner chair with your feet up while I make you some coffee?'

'Good idea. Thanks.' She should have kicked him out and got her key back from him but she felt – fragile. And she'd kill for a coffee.

The hot drink was soothing and after she'd had a few mouthfuls, she managed to pull herself together enough to ask him what they'd said on the news. 'Do they know who did this cruel, stupid thing?'

'They didn't on the one I saw. Why don't I switch on the TV now? They've got regular updates on the news channel. Half the block of flats was destroyed apparently and several people were killed. You're lucky to be alive.'

She hesitated, suddenly reluctant to see the incident, for some weird reason.

He looked at her, frowning. 'You're in shock, I think, Cassie. I've never seen you so pale.' He placed his fingers lightly on her forehead before adding, 'And your skin's clammy.'

She considered this, feeling distant from everything, as if she were looking down at herself from the ceiling, then

realised he was waiting for an answer so she nodded. 'I guess I am. Bound to be, I suppose.'

'I'd better stay with you for the rest of the night.'

'You're not getting back into my bed. We're not together in any way now.'

He gave one of his wry smiles. 'No. You made that plain when you chucked my things out of the door. When was that? Just over a year ago.'

'I can't think why you came. Does your new partner know?'

'Yes. And approves. I still care about you, Cassie. We were together for four years, after all. You'd come to help me if I'd been caught up in a terrorist incident.'

She was unable to deny that so just shrugged, then winced as her shoulder hurt.

His voice was suddenly sharp. 'What's wrong?'

'Something sliced into my shoulder. It hurt me when I moved it.' She didn't know what to say, didn't want to admit that she'd welcome his presence tonight. 'Um, thanks for coming. That was – kind.'

'Look, I can sleep down here on the sofa unless you've got a spare bed.'

She shook her head. She'd been frenetically busy lately, hadn't bothered to buy spare furniture after they broke up. She only did the most essential shopping these days, ate out mostly. Lots going on in the big, wide world. *Cassandra Benn Reporting* was getting high ratings. Her career had always been important.

Oh dear, he'd said something else and was waiting for her to answer. 'Sorry. Run that past me again.'

'You really shouldn't be alone tonight, Cassie. You should see how pale and bruised your face is. In fact,

whatever you say, I am *not* leaving you on your own here. Surely we can meet as friends now?’

She could have stood up and looked at herself in the mirror over the fireplace only she didn’t want to move. ‘All right, stay. Um, I am grateful.’

He brought a cup of coffee for himself and sat down on the nearby sofa. ‘Want to talk about it?’

She considered this, her thoughts still wheeling round in slow motion. ‘Nothing to talk about. Loud noise, an explosion threw me across the room and knocked me out.’ She rubbed the sore spot on the back of her head. ‘Next thing I knew I was in an ambulance. I’ve got those – what do you call ’em? – butterfly plasters on my shoulder. They think something with a sharp edge hit me, or I hit it, and I got a bit of a cut. And . . . there’s a lot of bruising. Nothing serious, let alone life-threatening. End of story.’

‘Shall I switch on the TV, then, see what’s happening?’

‘Yes.’ She turned towards the screen, forcing herself to watch as the story rolled out, wincing at the images of the block of flats half destroyed, cars scattered like a careless child’s toys, people clustering together, hugging one another, weeping. ‘I ought to be there, reporting on it.’

‘Hell no. This time you should definitely leave that to someone else.’

‘Mmm. I am a bit – tired.’ She looked down at her empty mug. ‘Any more coffee?’

‘When did you last eat? Shall I make you a sandwich or something as well?’

‘OK.’

He vanished round the corner into the kitchen area. ‘You’ve certainly let things go here. The bread’s mouldy

and there's nothing I'd dare eat in the fridge, not much in the freezer, either. I'll nip to the deli.'

'Don't bother. There's cereal and milk. That'll do.'

'Your favourite standby. I'm sure I can find them. It's not the biggest of kitchens.'

But when he gave her the bowl of cereal, she took one spoonful, had trouble forcing it down her throat and pushed the rest away.

'I think I'll go back to bed.'

He insisted on coming up with her to make sure she didn't fall because she was still dizzy. She hated having to depend on other people.

'I'll be downstairs if you need me.'

'Are you sure Tina won't mind?'

'I've rung her. She agrees with me that you shouldn't be left alone.'

She waved one hand. 'Make yourself at home, then, why don't you? But you're wasting your time. I don't need a nanny.'

'I'm still staying.'

She could hear the old, familiar stubborn tone in his voice, so didn't even try to answer.

She'd missed him. They'd been good friends once, until she'd become too obsessed with her job. It was no wonder he'd turned elsewhere for company. He was the sort of person who needed the company of other people.

It was a long time before she got to sleep again but she didn't leave her bedroom, didn't want Brett to see how disorientated she was. Her thoughts were still skittering to and fro, one minute back to the scenes on TV, then reliving the wild ambulance ride, and even focusing on Brett sometimes.

He was just as attractive as ever, damn him. She missed him. He'd been a better partner than she had, was still being kind to her.

Eventually everything began to go blurry and she gave in to the urge to let go.

In the morning Cassie woke with a start as something banged downstairs, setting her heart pounding. Then she realised it was only a cupboard door. Brett must have got up. She stayed in bed, hearing him go out and come back a few minutes later. Probably been to buy supplies from the nearby deli. He was a hearty breakfast eater.

Reluctantly she got out of bed. If she didn't, he might call a doctor.

Her bare feet made no sound on the stairs and he jumped when she said, 'Good morning.'

He swung round, studying her face. 'You still look pale.'

She shrugged, then wished she hadn't because that hurt her shoulder.

'Come and have some breakfast.'

She still didn't care about food, but if she didn't eat something he'd make a fuss and it seemed easier to do what he said. She accepted a pot of yoghurt, ate half a spoonful, then another and suddenly discovered she was hungry after all.

'That's better,' he said quietly. 'Piece of toast? I got your favourite black cherry jam.'

'Yes, please.'

When he was sitting opposite her, also eating toast, she asked, 'How are your kids?'

'They've both flown the nest now. Kind of you to ask,

considering they always treated you as an interloper.'

She shrugged. 'Teenagers can be like that. What about your parents? I did get on with them OK.'

He looked sad. 'They're showing their age, I'm afraid. Dad's got dementia and it's come on so quickly they've had to move him into a care home.'

'Oh no! I'm so sorry. Give your mother my best wishes next time you see her. She was always kind to me.'

They ate in silence till the toast was finished.

'Want anything else?' he asked.

She saw him looking at the clock. 'No, thanks. I'll be all right now, Brett, honest I will. You need to get to work.'

'You'll rest today?'

'Yes. And um, thanks for coming.'

'I'll pop in after work and bring you some groceries and takeaway.'

'You don't need to. I can go out and get some myself.'

'I'm doing it and Tina will agree. Surely you don't want to go out shopping and have the press following you around? There are a couple of journos hovering outside now. They tried to stop me and ask about you.'

She didn't reply, just flung her hands up in an 'I give in' gesture. 'Tell Tina thanks for lending you to me, then.'

When he'd gone the silence seemed threatening, and she found herself listening for footsteps outside the house. It was semi-detached, in an area full of commuters and the street was mostly deserted in the daytime. People could approach it without anyone noticing.

Suddenly worried that the outer doors might be unlocked, she rushed to check the front door then the back, leaning against the latter in shuddering relief when she found that

it was locked and all the downstairs windows were, too.

Only, she still didn't feel safe.

She put the telly on and wished she hadn't, but couldn't bring herself to turn it off again in case she missed something important. Eleven people had been killed in that explosion – eleven! – and several more had been seriously injured, with over twenty suffering minor injuries, herself included, she supposed. The block of flats was half its former size with ragged edges and shattered windows even where the walls were still standing. The remaining occupants had been evacuated and relocated.

She'd definitely been lucky.

Why didn't she feel lucky, then?

Why didn't she feel anything much at all? Except fear.