

The Assassin Awakens

by Christopher Coates

Chapter 1

A hospital bed stood in the living room adjacent to the large picture window. The patient's wife wanted the man to be able to enjoy the view of the outside world. That was a fantasy. Connor Braxton wasn't aware that the window was even there. He hadn't been aware of anything since his skull was struck at fifty-five miles an hour by the windshield of the car that hit him while he'd been jogging four years earlier.

Today the curtains on the window were closed, and that was unusual for this time of day. Very unusual. Connor's loving wife never closed the curtains except at night. She wanted the natural light to shine in. She thought it was appealing, and this was one of the dozen little things she did, hoping it would bring Connor back to consciousness.

It didn't matter what the physicians, therapists, and family members told her. She wouldn't give up. Her Connor wasn't gone; he'd be back, and that was the delusion that she lived in for the last four years.

It was one-thirty in the afternoon, and a young woman clipped a small pulse oximeter to Connor's left index finger. The device started responding immediately, indicating that his heart rate was 84 beats per minute and oxygen saturation was 96%, very normal.

Moving to the head of the bed, she held in her hand the mask she'd removed from a bag valve mask device. This device was typically used in attempts to resuscitate someone who wasn't breathing; today, its purpose was quite different. Attached to the mask was a six-inch length of blue corrugated medical tubing. The other end of the tube had a one-gallon storage bag

secured with a rubber band. She'd made sure the bag was full of air before attaching it to the tube.

With her makeshift device ready, she gently placed the mask over Connor's mouth and nose as he finished exhaling. The woman was careful not to use much pressure, just enough to keep an airtight seal between the face and the mask. She didn't want medical responders seeing marks from the mask on his face.

Watching, she saw the storage bag deflate as Conor inhaled and reinflated when he exhaled.

When Conor inhaled his first breath, the air he pulled in contained 21% oxygen. The air he exhaled only had 16% oxygen. With every breath he took in, the percentage of oxygen he drew in decreased further.

It only took a few breaths for the amount of oxygen to no longer be able to maintain healthy cells. However, it took a little longer for his damaged brain to detect the problem and respond by increasing his respiratory rate. The faster breathing only sped up the consumption of the rapidly dwindling amount of oxygen.

The woman glanced at the pulse oximeter. With growing excitement, she watched as the oxygen saturation steadily decreased and the heart rate increased.

As her own pulse rate increased, she was aware of her grip tightening on the mask, and she forced herself to relax a little.

She knew the signs of oxygen deprivation, but it was difficult to assess them on someone in a persistent vegetative state. However, the color changes, starting in the lips, were noticeable through the transparent mask.

At this point, his oxygen saturation was only 62% and still falling, and the heart rate was up to 130 beats per minute. If the assassin took the mask off his face, everything would return to

normal relatively soon, but the mask didn't come off. Instead, she prepared herself for the inevitable. After another minute, a seizure started. This was what she'd been concerned with. The seizure developed as the brain was deprived of oxygen. Her concern was if she'd be able to keep the mask on, using minimal pressure during the thrashing.

Fortunately, the seizure activity was minimal. His prolonged bedridden state had robbed him of most of his muscle mass, making the seizure unimpressive compared to most of the ones she'd previously witnessed.

During the seizure, the assailant noticed that the bag at the end of the tube was no longer inflating. That was expected. The question she had was if it would stay still once the seizure ended.

After twenty seconds, she got her answer. All activity stopped, and the bag remained still. While holding the mask with one hand, she slid two gloved fingers to his neck and placed gentle pressure against the carotid artery. She kept her fingers there for twenty seconds and felt nothing.

The killer removed the mask and was relieved to see that the marks it had made on the face were minimal.

Next, she took a minute and examined his eyes, face, and neck. She looked for the classic petechial hemorrhages that developed as someone fought to breathe while being smothered or strangled. There were none. In Connor's death, there was no fighting for air; he had plenty. It simply didn't contain the oxygen required to keep someone alive.

She disassembled her equipment and placed the mask back in the drawer next to the bed, with the other emergency equipment available for this patient. She put the tubing and rubber band in the plastic bag and shoved them in her pocket. Walking to the door and reaching for the knob, then she realized she'd almost made two fatal mistakes. She returned to the bed, retrieved

the pulse oximeter, and shoved it in her other pocket. Then she opened the curtains, placing them precisely in the position where she'd found them.

When she'd agreed to come here and do this task for five hundred dollars, she was concerned about how she'd feel afterward. The woman was shocked, never expecting to feel so alive and invigorated. It was the best rush she could've imagined. She'd just taken her first life, and she loved it.

