

# Oblivious

*by vic fortezza*

He was seated on a bench in lower Manhattan, on West Street near Battery Park. On his lap there rested fancy binoculars. He hadn't been in the area in 20 years. He was amazed at how it had been transformed. It was far enough from the ugliness, the perpetual construction near Ground Zero, and so clean one would think it was not New York. He smirked, certain politicians and businessmen had lined their pockets with the money that must have been thrown around in the modernization.

It was cloudy, the way he liked it -- no baking in the sun. People passed occasionally. He sniffed at the joggers, "Health Nuts," he dubbed them. He hadn't exercised since his last high school gym class. He was now retired, having put in 30 years as a token booth clerk. Only 56, he was living on a generous pension handed him by political suck-ups who'd had no idea, or hadn't cared, what such largess on a wide scale would do to future budgets, which were now billions in the hole. He didn't care, either. He'd gotten his and, by law, it couldn't be taken away, taxpayers be damned. The big shots who'd reaped fortunes in real estate and their enablers in office, who'd allowed the unqualified to secure loans, didn't care -- why should he?

He took a final drag on a cigarette, burning it down to its filter, and crushed it under foot beside numerous others. A middle aged woman who happened to be passing made a face, shaking her head. He laughed at her. If not for the fact that he'd already targeted someone, she would have been his next victim. What fun it was. The long years he'd suffered in those cramped booths, the relentless rudeness of commuters, was in the past. This was his time.

He'd used a different method in each instance. For the first he'd taken advantage of his lifetime pass and rode the subway to the Bronx, where he bided his time on a platform, finally found himself alone with a middle-aged woman, and sliced her throat with a box cutter before she knew what hit her. In seconds he was on the street

and on a city bus, paying the fare so he wouldn't be traced as a transit retiree. He was exhilarated. He needed no trophy, not like the saps on TV shows. The joy of the hunt and kill had been enough.

His wife nagged him about where he'd been. He'd refused to get a cell phone specifically to be as free of her as possible. She had no idea how often she'd been close to death, no more than those in the Towers had known planes would be coming at them that crisp, sunny September morning. The only thing that had saved her was the fact that he would never have gotten away with it, unlike his current killing, which he was sure would not be traced if remained smart. It was futile to dream of doing away with her and fleeing to another part of the country, changing his identity. Outside of her, he had it easy. Where else would he score a rent-controlled apartment? He prayed she would get cancer and die a painful death. He didn't care if ever saw his ungrateful children again, either.

His second murder was perpetrated at night in a remote part of Queens. He sneaked behind a Latino, no doubt an illegal, and calmly fired a bullet into the back of his unsuspecting head. He was snickering as he hurried to his car. He stopped on the way home to heave the gun into Gravesend Bay.

His third was at the mall in Staten Island in winter. He followed an old sour puss to her car, scanned the parking lot for possible witnesses, unhooked a hammer from inside his coat and, delighted she had no clue what was coming, crushed her skull with a single blow. He was sure no one would miss her. The world was better off without such a shrew. His heart was racing as he walked away. The hammer, too, was at the bottom of the bay.

His fourth was in his home borough, Brooklyn. For years bums had been gathering at certain spots in his neighborhood, panhandling aggressively, buying booze and retreating to their filthy haunts. He stalked the most obnoxious of the crew for weeks before getting him alone in an alley. As the sot tilted his head back for a swig, focused on nothing but alcohol, his judge, ecstatic at denying a final pleasure, slipped a rope around the pencil neck and tittered as liquid shot from the drunk's throat.

And now his fifth victim was approaching, jogging toward him with a friend, chatting, oblivious of danger. He'd been following her from a distance for months. He knew where she lived and worked. He was thrilled by the thought of exterminating a lawyer. He'd already determined how he would do it, having purchased a sophisticated rifle, driving to Virginia and back in a single day. He'd always been a good shot as a hunter. He didn't anticipate any problem other than finding a lair from which to shoot. He wondered if she should be his last victim. Why not go out with a perfect record, having hit all five boroughs? But it was so much fun. He would hate to give it up.

He lifted the binoculars and pointed it toward the women. They seemed to assume he was looking in the distance beyond them. His target, lean and beautiful, showed no sign of recognition. He loved it - one day going about life, the next snuffed without warning, just as nature did to so many.

A half hour or so later the two women were on the return leg of their run. Ahead, there was commotion near a bench. People were gathered around paramedics, who were working frantically on a man lying on the ground. There were binoculars nearby.

"Oh, my God," said one of the joggers, coming to a stop, eyes contracting with compassion.

"Guy didn't know what him," said a male bystander quietly. "Heart must've burst."

"Just like that," another mused, "out of the blue. Not that old, either. Scary."

"The poor man," said the lean, beautiful jogger.

