



TRIBULATION

A HEART-THROBBING SUSPENSE THRILLER

BOOK ONE OF THE COPS PLANET SERIES

JAYDEEP
SHAH

TRIBULATION

COPS PLANET #1

JAYDEEP SHAH

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To the raw tribulation of struggles,
To the raw tribulation of strife,
To the raw tribulation of fear.
And to the fighters of raw tribulations,
Remember:
You are stronger than the tribulations.

PROLOGUE

White, rangy Casie, in her thirties, looked extremely seductive in a beautiful blue cross maxi dress with floral prints. It matched her high heels, as well as her bracelets, necklace, earrings, and lipstick. She sat at the dining table near the kitchen door, putting her cell phone down in front of her. Casie stroked her hair as her beautiful, downturned eyes scanned the kitchen and the living room, finding someone. Then she settled herself comfortably into the chair as the servant came up next to her, holding a bowl of her breakfast.

“Enjoy your breakfast, ma’am!” said the servant in a croaky voice, putting the bowl of shrimp on the table with his trembling hands, lacking strength in his middle age.

“Shrimp!” said Casie through gritted teeth, clenching her hands and staring at the bowl. “Who eats shrimp for breakfast?” Her voice remained full of anger.

The servant’s slender body quivered from top to bottom. “I— I’m sorry for my mistake, ma’am,” he said in defense, “but today’s Monday.”

“So what?” said Casie in a slightly amplified tone.

“Every Monday, you like to have something different, ma’am,” said the servant. “So, I thought, *shrimp will be good for you.*”

Casie stood up, pushing her chair backward. Baring her fury, she stared at the servant, who didn’t dare to look directly back into her eyes.

“I’m sorry, ma’am,” said the servant. “It won’t happen again,” he added, as Casie took the bowl from his hands and put it on the table.

“Seems like you want to impress me?” said Casie, gently putting her hands on his shoulders. The servant slightly trembled, his weight shifting, trying to move away from her.

“I can’t even imagine—”

Casie lifted a finger, silently, instructing him to stop reacting and place his full attention on her.

“I know you like me. Look up. Look into my eyes.”

“N-no,” mumbled the servant, sensing something dangerous coming from Casie, his eyes almost wet.

“My hubby-bubby is not at home. I’m all yours. And I like you, too,” said Casie. “Let’s have some fun.” With a sweep of her smooth hands, she knocked everything from the dining table to the floor.

Then she grabbed the servant and pushed him onto the dining table. She was enraged at not having her breakfast on time, and at what he had brought her. The servant struggled to free himself from Casie's punishment, but she was stronger—she threw his legs up onto the table, tightening her grip around his neck.

Casie sat on his thighs, forcefully pulling off the servant's t-shirt and pants. Then, nearing her mouth to his, she said, "Impress me! I have given you a chance." She scratched his chest with her sharp fingernails, and said again, "Impress me!"

"Let me go, ma'am," begged the servant. "I assure you, it won't happen again." He was beginning to cry.

"I'm hungry. I want something to eat," she blazed. "Why not you?" She flared her nostrils.

She bit him on the neck so severely that the servant screamed louder than a siren.

"I'm sorry, ma'am," sobbed the servant. "I w-will pre-prepare a new breakfast. Ju-just a few minutes," jumbled the servant.

"Next time," said Casie, her teeth gritted once again, "don't assume. Ask before you do it." She jumped down from the dining table. The servant remained lying there, crying in humiliation.

"What're you waiting for?" yelled Casie. "I need breakfast."

The servant swiftly wiped the tears from his face, his expression showing fear and nausea—the fear of losing his life at any moment upon one more mistake. He jumped down from the

dining table, quickly gathered his clothes with trembling hands, and rushed to the kitchen, hugging the bundle to his chest.

Casie dragged her chair back to the table and sat. Her cell phone rang.

Alex. She read her husband's name on the screen, then picked up the phone, cooling her brain, inhaling and exhaling twice before answering.

"Where are you?" she asked. She could hear the excitement in her own voice, the eagerness to meet up with him. She was expecting to hear something good in his silvery voice, something to satisfy her ears. But there weren't her husband's warm words on the other end. The voice that greeted her was cold and flat.

"Your husband's dead in your old mansion, outside Villa Village."

Casie couldn't believe her ears. "Pardon me. What did you say?"

"Your husband's dead, at Fuentes Mansion."

A click sounded as the stranger hung up.

Casie's mouth remained open as she went blank, not registering the present. The total blankness allowed a memory to rush in. As the flashback played, her eyes widened in clear horror, as if she were witnessing the crime playing live in front of her.

A man and a woman are standing in the center of a room, trapping a girl who keeps begging for her life.

Both the man and woman raise their guns at the girl, threatening her that if she doesn't sign the paper, she will die.

Stained with blood, the girl signs the paper, and then the woman shoots her in the back.

The girl slightly tilts her head, and the woman smiles at her.

The man walks around to the woman, staring at the girl, and then he shoots her too, in the stomach.

The girl winces, tears running down from her eyes to her neck.

The man and woman's guns are still fixed on the girl. She looks up at them, her eyes filled with fury.

"Kill me!" she says. "But I promise I'll return to take revenge for my tribulations."

Enraged, both of them pull the trigger again. One bullet enters the girl's breast, the other her stomach.

Behind Casie, the servant stood, still naked except for a pair of underwear, holding a tray with two slices of buttered bread and a glass of milk.

He called to his master several times in a quivering voice, but the girl's words were echoing in her ears, drowning out all other sound: "I'll return to take revenge."

When the girl's warning stopped echoing, Casie screamed, "No!" The servant vibrated in fear and stepped back, almost dropping the tray from his hands.

Casie took a napkin from the napkin holder on the dining table and wiped the sweat from her face. Throwing the napkin aside, she ran out of the house in panic.

The servant remained standing there, holding the breakfast tray in his hands for a while, bewildered. He wanted to scream, to protest, to complain. But, there was no one to listen to him. Having no relatives, and no resources to find a new job, to feed himself, he had to work here, and he had only himself to share his feelings with. Shaking again at the recollection of her assault, he put the tray on the table and sat on the floor next to the chair, crying at the enslavement of his life, holding his head with both hands.

CHAPTER ONE

Casie pulled the car out from the parking lot and drove onto the foggy streets of Naples. It was a rainy fall day, and as she continued driving, the weather was growing worse. The lightning roared, huge bolts striking against each other in the sky. The light rain started to come down faster. Dark clouds hovered over the city, bringing on an early night. It became hard for Casie to see clearly through the windshield with the wipers continually moving back and forth.

After about three hours of careful driving through the life-threatening thunderstorm, Casie was now on the deserted gravel road of Villa Village. She accelerated the vehicle as her heart throbbed in agony, desperate to reach the mansion and find Alex safe. She whispered to herself, “I just can’t lose him. She can’t return. She died. She died right then, in front of us. That was six years back.”

As the car passed through the open fields approaching the mansion, Casie’s heart throbbed faster and faster. She was quaking with fear and worry, incredible thoughts drifting through her head. *If she’s returned, I’ll kill her. I’ll take vengeance on Alex’s death. She can’t kill me.* With every thought, the blood

boiled harder inside her, and her beautiful face turned pale, eyes red with fury.

The rain had stopped, yet the lightning was still rolling over the dark clouds, roaring its thunder. Within a few minutes though, beautiful, cotton-like clouds appeared, surrounded by clear blue sky. It was already late afternoon when Casie saw the mansion up ahead.

Seeing Casie's car racing toward the mansion, the athletic security guard standing at the twelve-foot-high gate opened the barrier in a rush, and Casie flashed past him, squealing up the mansion's circular brick driveway.

From afar, the mansion looked small, its true beauty concealed. But now, right up close, the mansion was entrancing—on a reserved eleven-acre parcel of land, surrounded by gorgeous, towering trees and an array of small plants in the garden.

As Casie accelerated up the drive, she almost lost control, narrowly avoiding crashing into the fountain—as the afternoon faded, the fountain's own lights switched on, casting colorful ribbons across the wall of the mansion.

When Casie finally braked in front of the mansion's door, the tires blew out, screeching savagely against the driveway. The sound scared everyone present: the security guard at the gate,

some servants inside the mansion, and a man with a burned face hiding behind the window curtains in one of the rooms on the second floor, peeking outside at the car, holding the slightly parted fabric in his fingers.

Casie exited the car, her gaze fixed on the mansion's front door and only there, never shifting to anything around. But the man in the room swiftly ducked away from the window anyway, just in case.

She dashed into the mansion, pushing the door open hard, and looked around, panting. As she took a few more steps into the foyer, a vision of her last visit to the mansion flashed through her head.

Almost everything was the same in the room as it had been then. Two tables, each with unlit lamps, stood quiet to either side of the entrance door. A beautiful Fresco painting hung on the wall to her right. A gleaming chandelier sparkled from the ceiling in the center of the room, and below it, a beautiful white wool sofa set rested, facing the TV on the wall beside her, next to the front doors. Behind the sofa, a set of stairs led up to the second floor, their shadows reminding her, again as vivid as if it were playing in front of her: a girl rolling down to the floor, screaming for help.

The only difference between now and six years ago was that then, the floor had been stained with someone's blood, while in the present, it was covered with beautiful flowers. Last time, the

room had been suffused with the awful iron scent of that gore. Now, the fragrance of beautiful red and pink roses filled the air, wiping out all other scents.

She was sweating profusely in trepidation. *The man who called me; he'll appear and lead me to Alex's dead body. If she's returned though, if she actually has, she might pop out of nowhere and kill me, too, the same way she killed my lifeline.*

"Alex!" shouted Casie, finally burying her fright. She stood near the stairs, holding the edge of the railing. "If this is some kind of joke, believe me, it's not funny." She looked around, but not even a servant had appeared in her sight since her arrival. Investigating carefully once more, she saw a man's silhouette on the second floor; he appeared to be trying to hide behind a pillar.

"Who's there?" shouted Casie, staring at the silhouette while tightening her grip on the railing.

The silhouette didn't react; the man remained steady. Perhaps he wasn't trying to hide at all.

Casie's heart throbbed as she walked up the stairs slowly and carefully, her vision shifting rapidly from the pillar to the silhouette and back to the pillar.

Suddenly, the stocky man popped out from behind the column, screaming. Casie screamed and stumbled backward, closing her

eyes to avoid looking at the man's burned face. The man rushed down the stairs, catching up to her quickly and grabbing her by the shoulders.

Casie screamed aloud and tried to break the man's tight hold on her, jerking and pushing him away.

"Help! Help!" shouted Casie. "Alex!"

The man freed Casie and swiftly removed his face. She turned away in confusion and horror, and then she realized—the burned visage had simply been a mask.

"I'm sorry. So sorry." Casie slowly looked up as she heard the familiar voice. The man was none other than her beloved hubby-bubby, Alex.

She kept staring at him, her emotions a mix of shock, fear, and anger.

"I'm sorry," said Alex, holding his ears and looking straight into Casie's wet eyes. "I didn't mean to make you cry. I'm at your feet, my lady," he said, kneeling. "I will accept whatever punishment you bestow upon me."

Casie gently put her hands on Alex's shoulders. Alex stood up, and Casie looked at him, wiping a small teardrop from her eyes.

"Your punishment is ..." said Casie after a brief pause. "You must provide me with a precious present, right now, without moving from your place."

"A present! Do you think that's even possible?"

“Yes! If you want me to forgive you.”

“Alright!” said Alex, smiling. “On three ... two ... one ...” Alex clapped twice, and the lights turned on. Two servants appeared out of nowhere and walked to the table in the center of the room. One was young, tall, and robust, standing straight and widening his chest, holding a tray of a cake in one hand and a knife in another; beside him, the other servant, slim, younger, and shorter, held a tray with a champagne bottle and two wine glasses.

Both put their trays on the table and said in unison, bowing to Alex and Casie, “Happy eleventh marriage anniversary, your prominence. May your day be filled with joy, as it’s your last.”

Both marched away from the table.

“Wait. What did he just say? Did he say it’s our last?” said Casie, looking at the servants walking toward the kitchen.

Alex wriggled his fingers in the air as if he was thinking, and then shouted after the servants, “Stop!”

The servants halted, gave each other a sideways glance, and then turned around. “Is there any error in our service, sir?” the tall servant asked, looking him directly into his eyes.

“What did you just say to us? What do you mean, our last?”

“I’m sorry, sir,” said the same servant. “We didn’t mean it.”

“Explain it to me, clearly!”

“We meant, sir,” resumed the other servant, “that it’s a tough life. No one knows what’s hidden in the chasm of the future. You know how many young, healthy people suddenly die—some of stress, some of a heart attack, and so on.”

“So you’re implying this may happen to us?” said Alex, a barely controlled fury in his cold voice.

“No, sir,” said both servants simultaneously.

“We didn’t mean that at all,” continued the tall one. “We want to see you safe and happy. Please forgive us our idiocy, sir.”

After a few seconds of staring them down, Alex nodded to them to leave, and turned to Casie. “Duffers!” He frowned and sighed in disbelief, waving his hand, signaling that they should forget the odd interaction.

Standing just an inch away from her, Alex smiled and patted her shoulder. “Here’s your present, my lady. And I didn’t move a bit.” He smiled broadly.

Casie shifted her vision to the cake, and then to the decorated room.

“Precious,” said Casie, widening her smile, shifting her gaze back to the chocolate layer cake. Frosting was drizzled across it, spelling out:

*Happy 11th
Marriage Anniversary,*

Alex and Casie

“I hope this poor man has been forgiven by his lady,” said Alex, bowing to her.

“Yes, my king. Your lady forgives you for all your errors.”

Both laughed, and then silence fell. They stood quiet, looking into each other’s eyes, then brought their lips near to each other, and after a quick peck at first, they hugged tightly and kissed passionately for a few minutes.

“Day by day ... second by second ...” said Casie, fondling Alex’s shoulder with her fingers, staring into his eyes while keeping herself locked in his arms, “I fall in love with you, more and more.”

She gave him another quick kiss on the lips.

“You are my king. You are my breath. You are my heart. You are my everything.”

They kissed for a few more seconds.

“I love you too, my darling,” averred Alex, tightening the hug. “You are my shine. You’re my life. You are my heartbeat. Without you, I wouldn’t have anything I possess in the present.”

All the while, the servants kept watching them, hiding in the kitchen, spying from behind the door.

“Let’s cut the cake now,” said Alex.

He picked up the knife from the table, and in unison, they said to each other, “Happy anniversary.” Slicing twice into the decadent crust, he severed a small piece, then picked it up and brought it to Casie’s mouth. She took a bite, moaning in pleasure, then pulled Alex’s hand holding the remaining piece to his mouth, pushing it in.

Swallowing, she said, “That was amazing. Chocolate layer cake with Oreo crumb and vanilla cream filling, right? Yummy!”

“I knew you would love it.”

“Oh really!”

“Of course, my love. I know all your likes and dislikes.”

“I don’t believe it!”

“Really?”

Casie remained quiet and kept looking at Alex.

“Okay,” he said, “now guess. Why didn’t I invite any of our friends?”

“You tell me.”

“Because I knew you wanted to spend this day without anyone’s interruption.”

Casie smiled, pushing her cheek out with her tongue.

“You really know me. That is why I only want you more and more.” She gave him a quick kiss on his lips, standing only an inch away from him.

“I’m all yours, my love—anytime, anywhere,” breathed Alex, pulling her to him.

Casie had just begun unbuttoning his shirt when she felt something dripping on them from the ceiling. She started and then jumped back, looking at her red hands, and the red spots on Alex’s shirt.

“Blood!” she shrieked.

“Seems like moldy water,” said Alex after carefully observing the liquid on his shirt.

“No,” yelled Casie, looking at her hands. “It is blood.”

She looked frantically up to the ceiling, but there was nothing there. She looked back down at Alex in fear.

Rolling his eyes and wrinkling his nose in disgust, Alex gently pulled her fingers to his mouth and licked off some of the liquid. His expression turned to horror, and he spat, as he realized she was right.

“Blood. How is it possible?”

“It must be the servants,” Casie said. Alex looked around and saw them ducking into the kitchen, out of sight.

“I know you are there,” shouted Alex, and they stared at the door, waiting for the men to emerge. “Come out here, right now.”

With a turtle's speed, the servants stepped out from behind the wall, looking down at the floor.

"Why were you hiding?" asked Alex, his voice full of ire and strict order. "What are you hiding?"

The servants continued to avert their gaze, neither opening his mouth to answer, which bolstered Alex's fury. They were playing some kind of game.

"I. Want. An. Answer." Alex walked over to them quickly, his voice cold as ice, jerking their heads up to make them look straight at him, and then pointing at the blood on his shirt. "Where did this blood come from?"

More and more, to both Alex and Casie, the strange words they'd spoken earlier were seeming like some kind of veiled threat.

"Speak up, boys!" raged Alex, through gritted teeth. "Before I chop your tongues off."

The servants stared at Alex for a while, wearing blank expressions on their face, and then, suddenly, the tall one pushed him away, hard. He stumbled back in surprise, and the servants sprinted toward the emergency exit in the kitchen.

Regaining his balance, Alex rushed to the kitchen and looked around, standing at the door, but the servants already had disappeared out of the mansion.

Why are the servants trying to ruin our day?

What was that blood? What did they have to do with it?

Something horrible is happening here. We have to find out what it is.

With these thoughts running through his head, Alex returned to the hall, where Casie stared at him, petrified. She opened her mouth, uttering words that only terrified him more.

“She has returned. I think they are helping her.”

Alex remained quiet, furious, clenching his fists to control his rage. Casie continued to stare at him, quivering from head to toe.