

Witness Transitioning Program (c) Elaine and Mr D 2024

Gary Alexander Smith was a 27-year-old Caucasian male with dark hair and a fair complexion, and he was also the unfortunate witness to a horrendous murder. After just escaping the same fate as the woman he saw gunned down in that dark alley he survived but not quite in the same way he had hoped or had wanted. The only consolation he had was that he was still alive to talk about it.

As part of a huge medical transformation, he was turned without his full knowledge into a 53-year-old Italian woman. Gary gets to experience life but not as he knew it.

Please note that this story is set in the future where medical science has advanced enough to permit some of the scenarios presented.

Part 1

Chapter 1 – Murder Witness

What started out as a nice night to celebrate his promotion to Project Manager, Gary Smith found himself expectedly caught up in a horror situation through no fault of his own. His two best friends Jake and Mark had joined him in the cellar bar for drinks and he'd ordered enough drinks that by the time they walked out they were wasted.

They headed over towards the bus stop dodging the insane traffic to get their transport home.

"I'm glad I'm not driving," said Gary who had downed a month's amount of booze in one night such was his determination to celebrate. Both Jake and Mark propped themselves up in the shelter to wait for the bus.

Gary heard what sounded like something hitting metal in the alley just a little further down the street.

"What the hell was that?" asked Jake who heard it too.

"Should we go and take a look?" suggested Mark. "The bus won't be here for another 15 minutes or so."

So, the three friends slowly walked towards the entrance to the alley and looked inside.

It was the kind of New York alley you never wanted to find yourself in at that darkest hour of the night. The small streetlights were either burnt out or were missing leaving the alley shrouded in an impenetrable darkness except where the incident was happening.

They suddenly lost their drunken euphoria when they saw a large man kicking what looked like a black bag on the ground. There were two other men who were standing watching as the man aimed kick after kick at the prone black object.

The only sound that broke the silence was the pathetic cry coming from the ground. Gary couldn't believe his eyes when he saw the sadistic silhouette of a man kicking someone.

Gary stood there, frozen in fear and disbelief, as the man casually walked back satisfied that the person wouldn't move.

"Hey, it seems we have a nosy parker," said the older of the two men watching proceedings. He immediately drew an automatic and aimed it towards Gary and his two friends. "Scram if you know what's good for you."

"Sure, thing Mister, we never saw nothing," Jake said back tracking urgently.

Gary though was either foolish or brave and moved forward towards the scene. The man shouted again, "I won't tell you again now clear off!" He then aimed his weapon directly towards Gary who decided that the threat couldn't be ignored this time.

"Ok, you're right mister it's none of my business," Gary replied as he backed away with his hands raised. He'd had a good look at the man and the huge automatic he was carrying.

"What's going on?" asked Mark his speech still slurred.

"I think it's a gangland beating," said Gary. Suddenly there was a gunshot from the alley followed by the sound of the men running away out of the other side of the alley. "They've shot someone."

He looked around the corner and peered into the dark alley and saw that the men had all fled. All that remained was the figure on the ground.

"Come on they've gone," Gary shouted. Gary ran back into the alley and expected to see a man lying on the wet dirty cobble stones. He was surprised to discover it was a middle-aged woman who was lying there injured. She'd been brutally kicked in the face, and she was bleeding profusely from her nose and mouth. Her flimsy clothes were torn and ripped. Her legs were battered and bruised too with wounds on her bare thighs from the many brutal kicks she'd received. Strangely he noticed that she was missing a red heel on one foot. To finish off the savage attack there was a hole in her side.

"Help me please Mister, they've shot me," she cried pitifully.

"Jake call for an ambulance," Gary said as he knelt to attend to her.

She grabbed his hand and sobbed, "My boys, my daughter... who's going to tell them?"

"You'll be all right," he said holding her hand until her pulse slowly stopped.

"My God she's dead!" Jake said alarmed. "They've killed her!"

"You better call the cops too then," Gary said covering the woman's badly damaged face with a newspaper he found beside the body.

Jake dialed 911 and when the operator answered, he told her what they had just seen and where it had happened.

"We've to wait until the cops arrive," Jake declared. "They're on their way."

As they waited, Gary couldn't help but feel a sense of dread creeping up on him about what had just happened.

Chapter 2 – Reluctant Witnesses

Sirens announced the urgent arrival of the police squad cars and an ambulance about 10 minutes later, and the three friends were questioned by a detective about what they saw and heard.

“There was nothing we could do man,” said Jake. “They were kicking hell out of her when we went to investigate what was going on. They threatened us with a gun so we backed off and then one guy must have shot her.”

“We’ll need a witness statement from you guys then,” said the detective. “I’m Lieutenant Joe Ross of the NYPD.”

“We can’t bring her back!” declared Mark who wanted to go home rather than hang around talking to the cops. “I don’t want to get involved in no murder. Those guys were nasty sons of bitches to do that to a woman.”

“Me neither,” said Gary who knew that by reporting what he’d seen, he could be putting a target on his own back “I want to go home and just forget this.”

“No can do,” Joe replied. “I’ll either take a witness statement from you in the back of my car right now or I’ll take you down to the precinct and lock you up for the night before a court appearance in the morning.”

“On what charge?” asked Jake.

“Drunkenness,” Joe claimed.

So, they all sat in the back of the squad car and recounted everything that had happened into a tape recorder held by Joe.

“You’re the only witnesses to that unfortunate woman’s death. Would you be willing to stand up in court and testify if we catch those hoods?” asked Joe.

“What and end up like her, dead in an alley?” Gary replied genuinely scared.

“We’d put you through our witness protection program,” Joe replied. “No one would ever trace you after your appearance in court. The witness protection experts are amazing, and you’d just disappear.”

“I’d also lose my new job,” Gary replied. “It’s taken me years to get my promotion.”

“Look we have a good idea who did this,” replied Joe. “If we put them in a line-up, will you try and pick them out?”

“That rules me out,” said Jake. “I never saw any faces.”

“And me,” added Mark. “You saw him though, Gary.”

Gary cursed under his breath and couldn't deny he got a clean look at the man with the automatic even down to the green and grey necktie he wore.

“Well, I guess I’m going to need protection because I saw the one with the gun and that man must have seen my face.” Gary confessed realising his future life was going to change completely as a result.

“Don’t worry, we’ll protect you,” Joe promised. “We’ll give you guys a lift home now I have your statements.”

Chapter 3 – A few days later

“Did you hear the news this morning?” Joe asked Gary during his early morning call.

“No,” replied Gary as he had just woken up.

“We’ve arrested three men in connection with the murder in the alley,” replied the detective. “We’ll need you to come down to the station to formally identify them.”

Gary groaned but reluctantly agreed. He was able to identify the man with automatic easily in the line-up while the other two men in the alley were known associates of the murderer with similar white supremacist beliefs.

All three men were formally charged with the murder of Mrs Callista Kamal who was the wife of a wealthy businessman on the east side. She was originally from Athens in Greece and had married her Egyptian boyfriend two decades earlier before arriving in the USA. She had a 13-year-old daughter and a 4-year-old son.

“Thanks Gary,” Joe said after the successful formal ID session. “We’ll take you to our safe house for the time being.”

“How long do I need to stay there?” Gary asked.

“Until the trial starts and for as long as it lasts,” replied Joe. “We’ll make sure after the trial is over that your present identity will just disappear.”

The next day, Gary was approached by a man from the Witness Protection Program. He told Gary that due to the nature of his testimony, he would have to go into hiding.

Sure, enough Gary was then taken to a safe house in a suburb of the city where he was placed under protective custody as it became clear he was the prosecutor’s star witness. The U.S. Marshals Service provided guard over Gary 24 hours a day 7 days a week. They brought him food, drinks and reading material as he waited for weeks to give evidence.

Gary soon realised that for his safety he wasn’t allowed to leave or even step outside the house, so he spent all his time watching television, reading books, or playing computer games. He also began learning Italian because he’d hoped to visit the village in Italy where his grandmother was born when all this mess was over.

A month after he had moved into the safe house, a newspaper article he’d read, gave Gary a clear reason to panic. A suspected petrol bomb attack had started a house fire which had led to a man suffering from serious smoke inhalation and second degree burns that had left him recovering in hospital. Meanwhile in another incident, a man was in a coma after the car he was a passenger in had failed to slow down around a sharp bend. The brake failure was traced to a cut brake line, and the car had crashed through a garden fence and into the side of a house. The driver was dead at the wheel.

From the descriptions, Gary quickly deduced that both Jake and Mark were now in hospital, and they would be unable to corroborate his testimony in court. In disgust and some fear, Gary crumpled up the newspaper angrily and seethed to James the agent on duty.

"I'm your last witness and I'm worried that there is no escaping these people!" Gary declared. "It looks like both my friends who were with me that night, are now in hospital so it's clear I'm going to be next!"

"I'll speak to my boss right now," James said after reading the article. "If need be, we'll move you out of here, but I don't think you're in any immediate danger."

"You think? You don't know? Look man I don't want a petrol bomb to come crashing through the living room window like what happened to poor Jake," Gary replied.

"You're in court the day after tomorrow," James said. "We'll make sure that you can take the witness stand."

"And then what?" Gary asked still genuinely scared. "If my testimony leads to their conviction and they get life or the death penalty they are still sure to come gunning after me."

After a long conversation with his boss, James suddenly announced, "OK just pack up your stuff because we're pulling out of here."

"Where are we going?" Gary asked whose nerves were on edge.

"It's best that you don't know. Just be assured that we'll be moving you to another maximum-security safe house closer to the court," James replied. "This new place will protect you."

"It had better James because I'm scared shitless," admitted Gary.

"I don't doubt you," James replied. "We've done this before, and you'll make it to court. They won't reach you where we're going."

"It's what will happen after I testify that worries me most," Gary said. "Are you going to keep your side of the bargain and keep me safe then for the rest of my life? These guys are really serious and for sure they will track me down. How can you possibly stop them?"

"Yeah, we will," James replied as he watched Gary pack up his stuff into two large holdalls.

Before the move occurred another 6 heavily armed security men arrived, and Gary was transported in a black armoured SUV to a secure building surrounded by tall security fencing and armed guards at the entrance gate. It was more like a prison than a federal building and they were clearly taking no chances with their star witness.

"You'll be here for a few weeks and then after court we'll take you somewhere else where no one will find you," said James as they entered what appeared to be a self-contained living area inside the main building. There were no windows but there was a comfortable looking living room, kitchen, bathroom and bedroom. Gary was panicking that even here that they would struggle to protect him.

Since it was late, Gary just went to bed, and feeling relieved about the enhanced security he closed his eyes and fell asleep. However, his dream became a nightmare, and he woke up in a cold panic sweat after he'd dreamt of being beaten up and then cruelly buried alive by the killer.

As the weeks went slowly by he found himself thinking more and more about the man he had seen murder the woman and what would happen if his cronies got their hands on him.

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“You’re finally required in court today,” said the facility head who had brought him a shirt, tie, clean shoes and a suit to wear that morning.

After getting dressed, he had a leisurely breakfast. The same armoured SUV collected him and took him to the court to give his key testimony. After the weeks of waiting around, his trial appearance was a bit of an anti-climax, and it was clear that his evidence was going to lead to the conviction of the three men. Gary stubbornly stuck to his story despite stiff cross examination questioning by the defence lawyer.

“You’re a dead man walking,” said one of the men on trial as Gary walked past him after he’d finished giving his evidence in the witness box. He looked around the court and saw a man and a young girl sitting huddled together in the public area. He had a goatee beard and looked like an Arab while his daughter had long dark hair and hazelnut-coloured eyes. Gary was still feeling scared, as he got back into the armoured SUV again in the underground car park below the court.

“What happens now? Where are we going?” asked Gary as they moved off.

“We’re going to uphold our part of the bargain we struck in return for you giving evidence,” said Carlos, the head of security.

“My friend is still in a coma and not expected to live, while the other is in a great deal of pain from the burns he’d received,” Gary said still feeling scared. “I don’t want that to happen to me!”

“I can understand that Gary,” Carlos replied. “There’s a new option we are offering to people like you. However, it’s extreme and once we start it cannot be reversed or stopped. We can guarantee though that you won’t have to look over your shoulder again.”

“What is it?” Gary asked. “It sounds like I need that.”

“It’s called ‘Witness Transition Program’,” said Carlos. “We’ll change you into the opposite of what you are now. You’ll become a completely different person, with a whole new identity.”

“Those men won’t recognise me afterwards?” Gary asked.

“That’s absolutely correct. Even your own mother won’t recognise you afterwards,” Carlos then declared.

“Then let’s do it!” Gary said desperately deciding that he wanted what was being offered. He had made up his mind immediately. “One of those hoods in court told me I was a dead man walking as I walked past him.”

“Very well in a few days we’ll take you to a new location for the transition and then your life will change,” said Carlos. “In the meantime, just relax until we move you.”

Back in his high security room, Gary switched on the television and watched the evening news. The first story on the local news channel was about the murder trial and that the jury had quickly returned a guilty verdict. The judge had then sentenced two men to life in prison with no parole, while the third was sent to a maximum-security prison at Sing Sing for life.

“At least something good has come out of this,” said Gary out loud to himself.

Just two days later and Gary was on the move again. Instead of the armoured SUV this time he was ushered into the back of an ambulance where he was asked to lie down on the gurney.

There was a pretty nurse and a doctor present who strapped him down.

“What’s going on?” Gary asked suddenly feeling alarmed.

“We’re just going to sedate you before you arrive at our clinic,” said the doctor preparing the back of Gary’s hand to accept the IV needle.

“Is this absolutely necessary?” Gary asked as the IV started flowing. Almost immediately he started to feel drowsy. Gary wondered what could be done such that he wouldn’t be recognised in future.

“Yes, unfortunately but it’s easier this way,” replied the doctor. “You’ll be beginning a completely new life. Do you have a preferred place that you’d like to live?”

“What?” Gary asked his brain beginning to rapidly fog up. “My grandmother came from Lazio in Italy, so I always wanted to go back there and to Malta.”

“Once you arrive at the clinic you’ll be completely in the hands of the top medical professionals,” the doctor claimed but Gary’s eyes were already closing thanks to the sedative. “When you wake up again, you’ll be a completely new person.”

Gary tried hard to listen to the doctor and nurse talking, but he was soon overcome as the drug kicked in.

They would be giving him a new identity and a new life, in the hope that he’d be able to live his life without fear.