

She felt lost and alone. At sixteen, she had no friends and certainly no boyfriend. Her parents kept nagging her to practice that damned piano. How she hated those stupid keys! As she stepped through the door of the day-care center, the words of her handler were clear in her mind. Just press the contact in her left hand and after a count of eight, her backpack would explode. Her handler was the first man to take an interest in her. She remembered holding hands and even kissing once or twice. They had spent many hours alone together. As he held her in his arms, he would tell her about the terrible things the government was doing around the world. Perhaps her sacrifice would open the eyes of others to the crimes of the state? Her death might convince the government to leave other countries alone while it conveniently ended her miserable existence. She closed her eyes and pressed the button. Eight.

A woman got up from her desk and said, "You can't be in here. You have to leave." Seven. She remembered the handler's last instruction to turn around at the count of three so the shrapnel would not be slowed as it sliced through her own body. She said nothing, but continued forward into the main room where twenty young children were being watched by three other women. Six. Now she was in the center of the room. Another woman said, "You both have to get out of here now!" What an odd thing to say, she thought and wondered what the woman meant by 'both of you'. Five. She turned around, expecting to see the woman from the front desk. Instead, a tall man with a closely cropped beard and dark brown eyes was smiling at her. His right hand came forward and placed a small device with flashing red lights on her chest. Four. Metallic fingers came out of the device and drove themselves into her skin. She winced from the pain. Suddenly, she was suspended in a globe of white light. Had the bomb detonated early? Is this what death felt like? There was no pain at all, not even from the steely fingers that stabbed her chest, leaving bloodstains on her blouse. She had no conception of time. Surely the bomb should have exploded by now.

The light vanished and she was now standing in a hospital room. Three. A woman was lying on the bed holding a newborn baby just a foot from where she stood. A man was standing next to the bed and seemed to be asking who she was. The couple looked so familiar, but different somehow. Two. Then it hit her. The couple was her mother and father, but they were much younger. Her eye caught a chart at the foot of the bed. The baby's name was the same as hers. It was her on the day she had been born! This can not be happening, she thought. She turned to run away. One. This isn't fair, she thought as she reached the door and tried to pull it open. Not like this! Not now! Zero.

The investigation into the three deaths went cold quickly. No one had seen anyone enter the room and none of the orderlies or nurses recalled anyone carrying a backpack in the ward. Somehow, it had been secreted into the room. The explosion killed the couple and their newborn infant, but no motive was ever found. Several patients and two nurses who were in neighboring rooms had been wounded, although none of the injuries were life-threatening.