

PRAISE FOR CORINNA TURNER'S I AM MARGARET SERIES

*Great style—very good characters and pace.
Definitely a book worth reading, like The Hunger Games.*

EOIN COLFER, author of the ARTEMIS FOWL books

*An intelligent, well-written and enjoyable debut from
a young writer with a bright future.*

STEWART ROSS, author of THE SOTERION MISSION

This book invaded my dreams.

SR MARY CATHERINE B. OP

Probably one of the best Christian fiction books I have read.

CAT CAIRD, blogger, 'Sunshine Lenses'

*This book is not for the faint of heart... I found myself emotionally
worn out by the time I finished the book, after a rollercoaster ride
of feelings... Without the faith element, I would probably have
merely liked this book. With it, however, I loved it.*

FR PAUL COLEMAN OFM Cap, blogger, 'A Certain Hope'

*The beginning was a punch in the gut... The ending went by in a
flash, and I paced the room reading the penultimate chapter.
Everything in between was alternatively moving, exciting, and sad
in turns.*

JOSEPH WETTERLING, Goodreads Librarian

**I AM MARGARET (I AM MARGARET Book 1) was awarded the
'Seal of Approval' by the Catholic Writers Guild in November
2014.**

**LIBERATION (I AM MARGARET Book 3) was nominated for
the 2016 Carnegie Medal Award**

The YESTERDAY & TOMORROW Series

Someday: A Novella

Coming soon:

1: Tomorrow's Dead

ALSO BY CORINNA TURNER:

The I AM MARGARET Series

1: I Am Margaret

2: The Three Most Wanted

3: Liberation

Coming soon:

4: Bane's Eyes

SOMEDAY

A Novella

CORINNA TURNER



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Any resemblance to actual people, living or dead, locales or events is entirely coincidental.

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*Words are more than sounds,
Falling off an empty tongue.*

John Glynn, 'Where Are You Bound'

RUTH

What the...! I jerk awake, ears ringing, heart pounding in my chest...

Oh, the fire alarm.

I'm closest to the door, so I swing my legs out of bed and find my way to the light switch. Gemma groans loudly as light floods the dorm, and retreats into her duvet, so only a few tufts of short red hair show. Annabel is already pushing long blond hair back from her face and groping sleepily for her dressing gown but Yoko sits up straight in bed, wide-eyed.

"It's just the fire alarm," I shout over the racket, pointing to the door. "We have to go outside."

Yoko looks slightly reassured—she hasn't understood everything I said, but she's figured it out. I pull on my dressing gown and shoes, pointing at them and smiling encouragingly at her—no time to look it up in her Japanese dictionary—she does the same.

"Gemma?" yawns Annabel, grabbing a hair tie. "D'you want to burn to death?"

"It's just a practice," grumbles Gemma, but she finally pushes back her duvet and sits up.

I beckon to Yoko and head out the door. Annabel follows.

"Oh, wait for me, why don't you?" Gemma shouts.

I carry on along the corridor. She'll catch us up. It's not a practice and she knows it. Sure enough, she's already hopping along after us from one foot to the other, as she puts her shoes on.

There's no crush on the central stairs—we're the only year in the main school tonight and the sixth form have a separate block. There's still a subdued murmur of complaint filling the air. It would have to happen tonight, wouldn't it?

"See," says Gemma snidely, catching me all the way up, "if there was a God, He wouldn't make this happen before our Physics exam, would He? Or did you not say enough prayers?"

"Here we go again," says Annabel, pushing her mass of blond hair back and readying her hair tie. "Obsessed, much?"

I tuck my slightly shorter dark brown hair behind my ears

and say nothing. Am I the only one who can see that Gemma's parents have spent too long on mission and not enough time with her? She wouldn't be so jealous of God if she wasn't hurting so much.

GEMMA

I open my mouth to reply to Annabel... break off, eyes widening at the sight of a uniformed—armed!—soldier rushing up the stairwell.

“Outside!” he yells, with some sort of inner-city accent. “Hurry up, everyone out!”

“Is there actually a fire?” gasps Annabel, her ridiculously long hair tumbling all around her again as she almost drops her hair tie. “Not just mice chewing wires again...”

But Ruth frowns slightly as she looks at the soldier—yeah, he's not a fireman.

He sees our expressions. “There's been a bomb threat. *Out*, now! Where is everyone else?”

“There isn't anyone else,” Annabel says over her shoulder, taking off down the stairs as though... she's just heard there might be a bomb in the building.

The soldier looks annoyed—yells after her, “Where are the younger ones?”

“Year seven are at an adventure training camp,” I reply, but I start down the stairs as well. Bomb threats are usually hoaxes but I'm so not risking it. Not the way things are at the moment. “Year eight, IT camp; year nine, French exchange; year ten, Venice, English trip. It's just us and the sixth form.”

The soldier swears loudly and starts herding us back down the stairs, giving me a push to hurry me along.

“Hey!” I protest. “If I fall and break something and you have to carry me, it's going to take even longer, isn't it?”

Ruth shoots the man another look and trots on down the stairs, guiding Yoko with her, like she's more scared of the soldier than of the bomb. And though I'd never admit it, I do kind of respect her opinion—at least on anything that doesn't concern the divine Sky Fairy.

The man's scruffier than any soldier I've ever seen—and since when do they dispatch armed men to evacuate civilians?

ALLELUIA

“Quit shoving, would you?” I snap at the man who's chivvying us towards the assembly point. “Think I wanna stay in there with a bomb, huh?”

“Hurry up,” he says.

That's all he's said since he met us outside the sixth form block and I'm sick of it. “Jesus loves you too,” I tell him.

He smacks me across the head and I gasp in pain. For a moment I can only gape at him. Did this soldier seriously just hit me? Then I see the assembly point ahead and it evaporates from my mind.

There's a row of trucks and a couple of horse vans—horseboxes, they call them over here—pulled up in the parking lot and more soldiers are forcing girls into them at gunpoint. Everyone looks scared—a few girls are crying. *Lord, what is going on?*

“Show us some ID!” Miss Trott is yelling. She's the senior housemistress. “You are not taking these girls unless we see some ID! Where are the police? Where's bomb disposal?” She grabs a soldier's arm, “ID, *now!*”

The soldier un-shoulders his rifle and casually smashes the butt into Miss Trott's face. She crumples to the ground in a horrible, boneless way. I jerk in a shocked breath—then grab Jill and Karen. “*Run!*”

I shove them towards the wood and dive at the soldier who hit me—after a moment of confusion I'm rewarded by the sound of running footsteps on the gravel path. The soldier shoves me away so hard I fall, tearing pyjamas and knee. *Om...* Blood oozes brightly across my black skin. But Jill and Karen have disappeared into the dark.

The soldier swings back to me—my heart freezes in my throat, everything freezes as he brings up the rifle and cocks it, hate filling his angry eyes...

ANNABEL

I can't believe what I'm seeing. A soldier just attacked Miss Trott. And another is about to shoot Alleluia Williams, the charismatic (oh my, in every sense) head of the Christian Union. What sort of soldiers *are* these?

"*No shooting!*" The guy who hit Miss Trott is yelling it. "NO shooting, remember? Hurry up, get them over here..."

"Two of them ran..."

"Leave them, hurry up. Where are the rest?"

He's shouting that at me... no, at the soldier behind us, who's... whoa! He's dragging Gemma by the arm and Ruth by her dark hair! They must've tried to bolt. These aren't real soldiers, are they... Why am I always so slow on the uptake?

"This is all of them. The others are away on trips."

Cursing from the... officer? Leader? "Fill up three trucks," he yells. "Leave the others."

They're shoving Ally up into a horsebox, un-shot, thank God. Miss Trott isn't moving, but they won't let the rest of the house staff help her.

"The young ones would have been worth more," the leader is grumbling. "Who knows if this lot are virgins?"

Did he really just say that?

Yoko's beginning to sniff quietly. Ruth's still being dragged, so pushing aside my hair, which I still haven't managed to do anything with, I put an awkward arm around her.

"Get in," orders another man, as we reach a white truck that looks like it should be out delivering washing machines or furniture. I head towards it at once with Yoko, then realize Ruth and Gemma haven't moved.

"If you want to die, sit down here," says the man harshly, "We will kill you. If you don't want to die, you will enter the truck."

RUTH

No shooting. So should we make another run for it?

The guy can tell what we're thinking, because he pulls out a

wicked knife, smirks as though he'd quite like us to try it, and says, "*In*".

Maybe not. Gemma still seems a bit shaken from being slammed into the wall when he caught us, so I help her climb up.

"Get in," I can hear the man by the next truck saying. "Don't worry, we won't touch you."

I move to scramble in after Gemma, but for a moment the soldier presses me against the back of the truck, his hand feeling my bum. Then he puts it between my legs. I can't move, I can't think what to do. I want to scream and try to get away, but I'm afraid that might trigger something even worse... Then the man shoves me up into the truck... and his hand is gone—but my heart pounds in my throat and terror washes through me and it feels like I understand for the first time that this is bad, this is *really bad*...

"We are *al-Qabda*," the leader is shouting, marching up and down in front of the trucks, brandishing the weapon he can't fire right now. "We will purify the world of infidels. There will be no more sinful education. Now you will study Islam and learn to please your husbands. Nothing more! *Allahu akbar!*"

"*Allahu akbar!*" roar the others. One of the house staff faints.

The leader glances at them dismissively. "Those ones are too old. No man will want them. Let's go!"

The roll-back is pulled down and locked, plunging us into darkness. I sit down beside Gemma and try not to shake, but now that my body's started it can't stop. That one touch makes me feel... *violated*. If only I'd grabbed my Bible, or my rosary or *anything*... Actually, it may not be very safe to have things like that, just now.

I make do with crossing myself and clasping my hands tightly together and trying to form some prayer a little more articulate than a simple scream of, 'help us!' But I can't.

Help us. Help us, Lord. Help us.

DANIYAH

The man is reaching for the truck door... my mouth is so dry I'm not sure I can speak, but this is my last chance.

"Please..." I croak, "*Allahu akbar!* I'm Muslim. Please let me out!"

"Muslim, *you?*" The way his eyes rove over my hair makes me feel like I'm naked. "In this school of infidels?"

"I don't go to any of the Christian services," I say in a rush, desperate to get it out, "I leave lessons to pray if necessary..."

"If you're a good Muslim girl, you'll be glad of the chance to be the bride of a brave *Jihadi*. You'll have an honourable marriage, you've no need to be afraid... *if* you're telling the truth."

He slams one door and reaches for the other.

"But... my family..."

"Not as good Muslims as *you* claim to be, or they wouldn't have sent you here, would they?"

"But..."

The door slams in my face. The engine starts. I sink down on the floor and wrap my arms around my head. It's dark in here, too dark to see, but I'm still afraid to look at anyone else, like they'll hate me for trying to escape.

They sent me here instead of a secular school because they are good Muslims. The thought pounds through my head. Because they thought at a Christian school I would be taught modest behaviour and wouldn't hang around with boys. I was going to be a human rights lawyer. Going to help people. And now...

I raise my hands and try to make *dua*. But the words won't come.

Allab... Allab... Allab... help us...

ALLELUIA

They slam the ramp up, the engine starts—the horse van begins to move. My heart's still beating so hard it's physically painful and I can't see anything but the muzzle of that gun, pointing straight into my face... I'm afraid I'm about to start screaming and never stop.

No. The Lord has preserved my life. I've gotta get hold of myself.

I drag myself to my feet, ignoring the ache from my bleeding knee, and try to get a look through the high window. There's a strange orange glow in the sky... Grabbing the window edge, I pull myself up and look out. Black smoke fills the sky and flames are licking from the main school building. They set the school on *fire*?

For a second the horse van's tail lights illuminate the sign behind us as we turn onto the main road.

Chisbrook Hall Girls School
A Methodist Foundation Welcoming All
Age 11-18, Boarding and Day

Most of us love our school, but right now even I'm wishing Mom and Dad had sent me somewhere else.

Why us? Why us, Lord?

How can this be happening here, in the UK? I thought it was Mom and Dad this could happen to, out on mission. Or back home in the US, where it seems like people wander into schools with guns all the time.

Not us, *here*...

GEMMA

Ruth's sitting beside me, shaking so hard I know I missed something. 'Cause Ruth's the last person I'd expect to freak out. But when I grope for her hands in the dark I find them clasped. She's praying. The familiar anger surges through me and I try to yank them apart. "There's no God! We're being kidnapped by bloody religious maniacs and you still think there's a God! I don't believe you! How can you be so smart most of the time and so thick about this?"

Ruth doesn't say anything. Doesn't mean she's totally lost it. She's not exactly Miss Talkative.

"I often wonder the same about you," says Annabel from nearby, sounding almost normal.

“Oh, shut up,” I snarl. “You think God’s watching over us, do you?”

“I certainly hope He is, given the circumstances.”

I almost laugh, but I’m too angry. “You’re mad. And you’d better watch what you say around these men or they’ll kill you.”

“They’re supposed to treat ‘People of the Book’ okay,” says Annabel. “I’m sure it says so in the Quran.”

“Yeah? Well, I saw them shoving Daniyah from year twelve into another truck, so if you think you’re going to get treated better than her, you’re going to be disappointed. Anyway, I happen to know it also says in the Quran that they should beat women and chop unbelievers’ heads off. So just keep your mouth shut and do whatever they tell you, okay?”

I shove my hands through my short red hair, trying to get my temper under control. After a moment I drop them again and raise my voice. “Hey, is there anyone in here who speaks Japanese?”

Silence. Not exactly silence. Sobbing and sniffing. Well, surely Yoko can figure out that she’s got to do as she’s told. If she can understand what she’s being told...

“It’s not that simple, Gemma.” Ruth speaks at last. Her voice is almost steady, but I’m still sure something happened while I was feeling dizzy.

“What isn’t?”

“Doing what they tell us. The first thing they’ll probably tell us to do is recite those words that make you Muslim.”

“So we’ll recite them. It doesn’t make you anything if you do it under duress.”

“You think it doesn’t? *They’ll* certainly regard you as Muslim forevermore.”

“They can think what they like, it won’t be true.”

“Well, I’m not saying them. No Christian should.”

Her quiet statement chills me. Surely Ruth, one of the most obliging people I know, isn’t going to choose *now* to be difficult?

“Maybe they won’t want us to.”

But I don’t even sound like I’m convincing myself.

ALLELUIA

We're on the highway now. My knee is still hurting. I can feel a trickle of blood running down my leg. I can't tell which way we're going. I sit down again and try to take stock. Jill and Karen got away. The house staff were left behind, alive. Miss Trott... hurt but alive, I reckon. I saw them manhandling Ruth, of all people. She must've tried to run.

Reverend Philips says I bring almost as many people to Christian Union with my mouth as I scare away and that's saying something. But Ruth brings just as many without hardly opening her mouth at all, so go figure. Well, it's not her that brings people any more than it's me, of course. It's Jesus our Saviour; so it's not really a mystery.

That militant atheist girl—what's her name, Gemma—the red-headed wildcat who hangs out with Ruth a lot, I wasn't so surprised to see her being dragged around. I hope she keeps her mouth shut. Dad says these wackos hate atheists worse than Christians.

Oh no, what about Deborah? Is she year eleven? No, she's year ten, isn't she? So she's in Venice, praise God. But they brought Daniyah... Why, for pity's sake?

But the point is, they left lots of people behind, so any moment we should hear sirens and get rescued.

We've just gotta be patient, right?

ANNABEL

I've finally managed to tie my hair back. I forgot about it for... what seemed a long time. I've always been so proud of my long blond hair. Now I wish I didn't have quite so much of it. Those men... they have funny ideas about hair, don't they...?

How long have we been driving? Why haven't the police stopped us yet, or the real army?

"What's taking so long?" I whisper, kind of to myself, but Gemma answers.

"The school was on fire, they could hardly just run in and phone the police!" She raises her voice, slightly. "No one in here has a phone, right? *Please* tell me you'd have mentioned it

by now?”

No answer. Our mobiles are locked in the phone cupboard during the week, only allowed out at weekends.

“I thought the fire alarms were connected to the fire station?” I say. Gemma’s lucky, her hair is really short...

“I think they are, but the first people on the scene will be firemen, won’t they? Then the police. Then they’ve got to get a description of the vehicles from whichever of the staff are still conscious and making sense.”

“Surely one of them memorized a number plate?” a new voice chimes in. A strong local accent...

“Sasha?” I check. One of the day girls from our year. At least there’s one more person in here not having hysterics. But her hair is quite long too. Long and frizzy.

“Yeah, it’s Sasha. They’ll have got the plates, surely? People always get the plates on TV.”

“The plates were covered in mud about an inch thick.” Ruth delivers this awful news very apologetically.

Ruth’s hair is fairly long... “Still... how many trucks are driving around at this time?”

“Rather a lot, I imagine,” snaps Gemma. “Didn’t you hear the birds? It’s near dawn. Every delivery lorry in the UK will be out and about soon. Still, for this... they’ll stop every truck in the country if they have to.”

“We’ll switch vehicles,” says Ruth, even more softly than usual—I hardly hear her. “Any time now...”

“Aren’t you Miss Cheerful,” says Gemma. But from the shake in her voice, I can tell she thinks Ruth is right.

Someone wriggles past me and starts, from the sound of it, pawing at the bottom of the roll-down door.

“Who’s that...? I heard them lock it...” It’s my turn to speak apologetically.

“It’s me.” Ruth’s voice. “I’m looking for a panel or something that might be covering wiring. For the lights.”

“Yes!” Gemma’s hiss is ferocious. She shoves her way past me and begins scrabbling around as well.

“I’m not convinced it’s in here with us,” Ruth adds quickly. “I think the lights are too low down. But.”

But. We're jolly well going to make sure. I've caught on. They want to try and flash SOS to the other traffic—or at least make the lights behave oddly. Like we saw in that film last term. Someone *might* notice.

ALLELUIA

No one's got a phone and I can't find any wiring anywhere. Every time I touch something and get hopeful it's just another bit of horse equipment. Still... "This is a horse van, not a prison van," I say out loud. "How secure can it be?"

"There's a door up front here," someone calls. Sounds like Becky, from my year. "But it's locked."

"Oh? 'Scuse me..." I start working my way through to the front.

"Becky?" I've reached a doorway.

"Is that you, Ally? I seriously cannot see you *at all*. The door's in here. It's the living area. I thought we might be able to bash them over the head with something, but they've blocked off the opening into the cab. The good thing about it is that they can't see what we're doing."

"Where's the door?"

"Here..." She taps on the wall beside us, her hand a pale blur. She's right, I can't see my own hands at all.

I reach out and feel around. A door. I try the handle. Locked, yeah. But there's a big window next to it, with a board nailed over the middle, cutting out almost all the light. I move that way and bump into... a sink unit?

"I bet we can kick that door in," I say to Becky. "But if not, perhaps we can get out the window."

"We're on the motorway. We'll have to wait until we come off."

"You can bet we'll be changing vehicles really soon. We should go now."

"But they'll have to come off and slow down to change vehicles. We should wait! We must be doing fifty or sixty miles an hour, Ally!"

"It's got to be now! How long will it take us all to jump? If

we're on a normal road they can slam the brakes on the moment the first one goes and get out and stop most of the rest. They can't exactly reverse back down the highway to catch us, can they? Well, I guess they could, but they'd attract exactly the attention they need to avoid. I'm going *now*."

Becky's silent for a long moment. "I'm waiting for them to slow down," she says at last. I open my mouth to argue, but... she's probably worried about breaking something, she's a ballerina. Quite a good one. There's no time to argue about it... I pull her back into the horse area and shut the door.

"Listen, everyone," I shout, over the engine and road noise. "We can get out up front so we plan to jump. I think we should go now, because they won't be able to do much about it—and I figure we'll be changing vehicles soon so any delay and we'll miss our chance. Becky's going to wait until we pull off the highway, but seriously, guys, I think you should come with me now."

There's a shocked silence, punctuated by sobs from people who clearly haven't taken in a word I've said.

"Ally, we're on the *motorway*!" Megan says. "You can't be serious! We'll be run over!"

"If we survive the impact!" says Frankie.

"Don't you understand?" I yell, desperate to make them see. "These men are going to force us to become Muslim—or kill us if we refuse. That's what they *do*! Either way, they're going to sell us as sex slaves and we're going to spend every day of the rest of our lives being raped and cooking and cleaning for beasts who think we're nothing but animals made to serve them. *That* is what awaits us if we don't get out of here! We've more chance of escape if we go now! It's worth the risk!"

BECKY

"Anyway," shouts Ally, "We're in the slow lane and the door's on the left. We'll land on the emergency lane. We're not gonna get hit! Who's with me?"

There's a murmur of agreement and some girls push forwards, others stay put.

“You’re mad!” says Frankie.

Megan makes a sound of agreement. “The fall will kill you! Or they’ll shoot you!”

“Let them!” says Ally. “This is our best chance! I’d rather die than go with them anyway.”

Her certainty is infectious. Most of the *compos mentis* girls are now crowding forward, as far as I can tell. Am I doing the right thing? It just seems such an unnecessary risk—one bad break and I might never dance again—everything I’ve worked for, for so long, gone... But if they see Ally and the others jumping now, will I get a chance once we slow down?

“Come on,” says Ally. “Those who’re sure they’re going to jump, to the front. Don’t go up to the door unless you’re really going to do it or you’ll stop others getting through. Okay?”

Another murmur of agreement from the group around her. My insides are churning with indecision. I crouch down beside one of the sobbers—Jasmin from my year—and try to get her to understand what we’re doing, but it’s useless.

“Right,” Ally’s shouting again. “When we kick this door in, we jump at once, straight after the other, we make it quick! Curl in a ball, you’ll bounce better. Okay?”

The people at the front sound pretty determined, but... I wriggle through to Ally. “You’d better go first,” I whisper in her ear.

“What? I’ll go last, make sure they all get out...”

“No, go first, Ally. If the men see the door open, and then someone hesitates... Going first is hardest.”

She grabs my hand. “Come *now*, Becky, please... I know the dancing is important to you, but it’s not worth...”

I shake my head, though she’ll barely see it. I know with absolute certainty that I can’t jump from this vehicle, not at this speed. I’m starting to think I should, but I know I won’t. “We can’t all be as brave as you, Ally. Just go, for God’s sake.”

Her black face is invisible in the darkness but I know she’s scowling ‘cause I took the Lord’s name in vain. I s’pose I’m just not sure enough of what comes after to throw myself out of a moving vehicle.

She raises her voice and prays unusually succinctly. “Oh

Lord, grant us Your protection! In the name of Jesus! Amen!”

Rather more people echo her ‘Amen’ than would usually do so. This sort of situation does that to people. Ally is already kicking the door. Several people join her and for a few hour-long moments there’s just thudding and grunting and... splintering. A rectangle of light as the door flies open... Ally doesn’t hesitate. She just yells, “*Praise God!*” and jumps out.

And she’s gone.