



Grady Hendrix

"Sizzles with action, originality, and
a gleaming concept sharp as a scalpel."

CHARLAINE HARRIS
New York Times bestselling author

**THE
FINAL
GIRL
SUPPORT
GROUP**

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About the Author

Acknowledgements

PRAISE FOR

The Final Girl Support Group

“Grady Hendrix’s canny new novel, *The Final Girl Support Group*, gathers all the tropes and iconography of a decade’s worth of slasher movies and throws them into a blender with much more wit and intelligence than any of those movies displayed, in a truly original, compelling, suspenseful tour de force... with a knowing wink. Hendrix has a rare, unique voice in a genre sorely in need of more!”

Mick Garris, writer, director (*The Stand, Bag of Bones, The Shining* miniseries)

“*The Final Girl Support Group* is a deft examination of how our culture’s obsession with misogynistic violence destroys the lives of women and how those women are able to keep fighting and living after unthinkable trauma. The beating heart of this book is empathy and it’s set into a lightning-paced, vicious thriller. Reading it was a catharsis. Absolutely unmissable. Horror fans... you’ve never read a slasher like this.”

Mallory O’Meara, bestselling author of *The Lady from the Black Lagoon*





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The Final Girl Support Group

Hardback edition ISBN: 9781789096064

Forbidden Planet edition ISBN: 9781789099133

Waterstones edition ISBN: 9781789099126

E-book edition ISBN: 9781789096071

Published by Titan Books

A division of Titan Publishing Group Ltd

144 Southwark Street, London SE1 0UP

www.titanbooks.com

First edition: July 2021

2 4 6 8 10 9 7 5 3 1

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A CIP catalogue record for this title is available from the British Library.

Amanda,
True love is putting someone else,
Before yourself.
Which is why I thought,
You should walk across that ice,
Before me.

*final girl (n.)—the last and
sole survivor of a horror movie*

r/lastladies Posted by u/fu(bar)gate 17 months ago
LAST WORD ON FINAL GIRLS doc on youtube has 2.1 million views. WTF? Who cares about a bunch of grandmas with saggy necks. If one of them was hot okay I can understand but I'm so sick of hearing about them

Share Save Hide Report

r/lastladies Posted by u/orchomenus 17 months ago
time wont be kind their 15 minutes were up 15 years ago

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r/lastladies Posted by u/fu(bar)gate 17 months ago
I wish they would all disappear

Share Save Hide Report

r/lastladies Posted by u/orchomenus 17 months ago
be patient remember viper hansen, ricky walker, and walter scroggs are in prison not dead people say dream king still out there one day people will totally forget about FGs then they will get what they deserve

Share Save Hide Report

—thread from r/lastladies, the Final Girls subreddit



The Final Girl Support Group



I wake up, get out of bed, say good morning to my plant, unwrap a protein bar, and drink a liter of bottled water. I'm awake for five full minutes before remembering I might die today. When you get old, you get soft.

In the living room I stretch and do forty knee strikes, forty palm heel strikes, and side mountain climbers until sweat drips onto the concrete floor. I do elbow strikes until my shoulders burn, then I get on the treadmill, put the speed up to seven, and run until my thighs are on fire and my chest rasps, and then I run for five more minutes. I have to punish myself for forgetting exactly what the stakes are, especially today.

The bathroom door gets padlocked from the inside while I shower. I make up my bed to eliminate the temptation to crawl back in. I make tea, and it's not until the electric kettle clicks that I have my first panic attack of the day.

It's not a bad one, just a cramp in my chest that feels like a giant hand squeezing my lungs shut. I close my eyes and concentrate on relaxing the muscles lining my throat, on taking deep breaths, on pulling oxygen into the bottom of my lungs.

After two and a half minutes I can breathe normally again and I open my eyes.

This apartment is the only place in the world where that's possible. A bedroom, a living room, a kitchen, and a bathroom where, as long as I take reasonable precautions, I can close my eyes for two minutes. Out there in the world it's a nonstop murder party, and if I make the slightest mistake I'll wind up dead.

I go into the living room and turn on CNN to see what the body count is today, and from the very first image I know that the next twenty-four hours will be bad.

A live drone shot of a summer camp is buried beneath all the other junk CNN puts onscreen. It shows sedans and emergency vehicles clustered outside the cabins, men in white hazmat suits walking between the trees, yellow police tape blocking the road. They cut to recorded footage of the night before, blue lights flashing in the dark, and the slugline hits me in the gut: *Real Life Red Lake Tragedy Repeats.*

I turn on the sound and the story is exactly what I feared. Someone murdered six Camp Red Lake counselors who were shutting the place down for the season. They used a variety of weapons—hand scythe, power drill, bow and arrows, machete—and would have had a seventh victim except the last one, a sixteen-year-old girl the CNN chyron tells me is named Stephanie Fugate, shoved them out of the hayloft.

The killer hasn't been identified yet, but there's Stephanie onscreen in a class photo with her round face and clear skin, smiling through her braces with a grin that breaks my heart. After last night, she'll never be that happy again. She's a final girl now.

You're watching a horror movie and the silent killer knocks off the stoner, the slut, the geek, the jock, and the deputy, and now he's chasing the virgin babysitter through the woods. She's the one who said they shouldn't party at this deserted summer camp, break into this abandoned lunatic asylum, skinny-dip in this isolated lake—especially since it's Halloween, or Thanksgiving, or Arbor Day, or whatever the anniversary is of those unsolved murders from way back. The killer's got a chainsaw/boat hook/butcher's knife and this girl's got zip: no upper body strength, no mass, no shotgun. All she's got is good cardio and an all-American face. Yet somehow she kills the killer, then stares numbly off into the middle distance, or collapses into the arms of the arriving police, or runs crying to her boyfriend, makes one last quip, lights one last cigarette, asks a final haunting question, gets taken off in an ambulance screaming and screaming like she's never going to stop.

Ever wonder what happens to those final girls? After the cops eliminate them as suspects, after the press releases their brace-faced, pizza-cheeked, bad-hair-day class photos that inevitably get included on the cover of the true crime book? After the candlelight vigils and the moments of silence, after someone plants the memorial shrub?

I know what happens to those girls. After the movie deals get signed, after the film franchise fails, after you realize that while everyone else was filling out college applications you were locked in a residential treatment program pretending you weren't scared of the dark. After the talk show circuit, after your third therapist just accepts that he's your Zoloft-dispensing machine and you won't be making any breakthroughs on his watch, after you realize that the only interesting thing that'll ever happen to you

happened when you were sixteen, after you stop going outside, after you start browsing locksmiths the way other women browse the windows of Tiffany's, after you've left town because you couldn't deal with the "Why not you?" looks from the parents of all your dead friends, after you've lost everything, been through the fire, started knowing your stalkers by their first names, after all that happens you wind up where I'm going today: in a church basement in Burbank, seated with your back to the wall, trying to hold the pieces of your life together.

We're an endangered species, for which I'm grateful. There are only six of us still around. It used to make me sad there weren't more of us out there, but we were creatures of the eighties and the world has moved on. They used to dust off the clip packages for our anniversaries or the occasional franchise reboot, but these days it's all oil spills and Wikileaks, the Tea Party and the Taliban. The six of us belong to another era. We're media invisible. We might as well not even exist.

As I turn off CNN I realize I miscounted. There are actually seven of us; I just don't like to think about Chrissy. No one does. Even mentioning her name can mess with your head because she's a traitor. So I take a minute, even though I only have three hours to get to group, and I take a deep breath and try to get my focus back.

Adrienne's going to be a mess. Camp Red Lake was where it happened to her, but she bought the place later and turned it into a retreat for victims of violence, mostly survivors of school shootings and kids who got away from their kidnappers. This hits her where she lives. At least it'll give us something new to talk about besides whatever old business we're still arguing over today.

When I can't put it off any longer, I get ready to head out. Group is the only time I leave this apartment except to go to the mailbox place across the street once a week, to check my escape routes once a month, and my biweekly trips to the corner store for supplies. I don't like risk. My hair is short because long hair can get grabbed. I wear running shoes in case I have to move. I don't wear loose clothing.

I inventory my pockets: keys, money, phone, weapons. I stopped carrying a firearm on public transport after an incident a couple of years back, but I have pepper spray, a box cutter in my right front pocket, and a razor blade taped to my left ankle. I don't wear headphones, I don't wear sunglasses, I make sure my jacket is tight so there's nothing to snag, and then I say good-bye to my plant, take a deep breath, step out of my apartment, and face a world that wants me dead.

FINAL GIRL SUPPORT GROUP
Notes by Dr. Carol Elliott
Session No. 188
September 2010

ATTENDING

Marilyn Torres
Adrienne Butler
Dani Shipman
Lynnette Tarkington
Heather DeLuca
Julia Campbell

Pre-session notes: Surprised to see that this month marks the 16th anniversary of regular group sessions. Facilitating this group falls outside my normal workload, but these women have been my patients in one way or another longer than my children have been alive.

Sad to note that years of strong rapport and good group cohesion has fallen off over the past twelve months. Recent sessions marked by crosstalk, incessant argumentation over minor matters, and relentless interpersonal criticism. Adrienne remains practically a co-facilitator, constantly modeling effective behavior, but Marilyn and Dani seem restless and irritable. Heather's attention-seeking and improvisational approach to recovery cause constant conflict. Lynnette's hyperarousal seems unimproved.

What remaining purpose does group serve after all this time? Who will be the first to terminate? Should I take steps to bring this to an end myself?

—Dr. Carol Elliott, private notes on group session, September 2010

