

THE WRONG HOUSE

CHAPTER 1 THE RAID

It's a Friday morning in July and I'm standing in my nightgown at my open front door.

"You have the wrong house," I say to the man in the black FBI cap.

He points his gun at my chest. "No, ma'am, we don't. Put down the dog."

Our short haired chihuahua, Jake, is quivering in my arms. The agent tips his gun toward my face. "Ma'am, dog on the floor, please."

"But...but he might run out..."

"We chase dogs all the time to get 'em back," says one of the other two agents behind him, aiming her gun squarely at me.

Shaking, I lower Jake to the floor, and he skitters toward the hall just as my twenty-four-year old daughter Abby shows up wearing only an oversized t-shirt. She freezes.

"You," says the agent, "phone on the floor. Now."

Abby's older sister Grace calls from the hallway. "Mom?" She appears holding Jake who is barking, ears perked up.

"Don't move," says the agent, raising his voice a notch. "Just put down the dog." Grace lets Jake escape to another room.

I'd been dozing in bed, alone with Jake tucked in a ball by my side. The scent of pine and roses wafted in from wide-open windows. Maybe the heatwave would break this week.

Loud pounding at the front door jolted me. Then the bell, frantic and rude. *Did the tree trimmers needed us to move Abby's car?* More pounding. *Why was my husband Paul not taking care of this?* I scooped up my dog and rushed down the hall to investigate.

And there I was with a gun in my face. Paul must have been on the other side of the house, in the office, maybe on a call, so he didn't hear them tell me to turn around to be handcuffed and ordered to walk backwards out the door. He didn't see them cuff his daughters' wrists behind their backs, leading them out one at a time.

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We huddle together, barefoot on the flagstone walkway, too terrified to speak. Hyperventilating, Grace inches close to Abby who is shivering even though it's already warm on this early mid-summer morning.

This has to be a mistake.

Two agents appear with Paul. He's wearing only the thin black robe I've been trying to throw away for years, the ninja robe I called it, tied, but gaping open, exposing the white hair on his chest. No chance to close it with hands secured behind his back. The burly agent in sunglasses to his left says something, but Paul stares straight ahead as they bring him toward us. When I try to connect, he looks through me.

The four of us stand on display on the front walkway of our carefully landscaped country-in-the-city house, surrounded by a dozen FBI agents in bullet proof vests. Neighbors on the way to work or school drop-offs cruise by, waved on by two local police officers standing next to a squad car. An unmarked black van moves into a space across the narrow street. Three men jump out, removing metal cases from the rear. A few yards away is a larger van, gray, with no windows, stationed on the same side of the street.

A slender female agent watches over us while other agents enter the house. Paul, silent, aloof, remains feet away from me.

"What is this?" I say in a loud whisper. He shakes his head and looks away.

The female agent turns to me. “Don’t worry, ma’am, they’ll go over all the details when you go inside,” as if they are in there writing up an estimate to repair the roof. “They’re just finishing the weapons sweep.”

Weapons sweep? Having a weapon of any kind in my house is inconceivable, I want to tell her, but my night guard is still in my mouth and would garble my speech.

“There’s a BB gun in the office closet,” says Paul. *Oh, right, the stupid BB gun that looked like a rifle.* Long ago, he’d bought it on a whim and used it only once to shoot a rat by the pool.

I glance at the street. Dog walkers and more gawkers in cars slow down but are hustled along. Robyn, who’s lived next door for years, usually speeds by in her Range Rover, but today, she grinds to a stop and catches my eye. I turn to hide my face. My throat feels dry, my shoulders hurt, and the handcuffs are pinching my wrists. It dawns on me I’m wearing no underwear.

Soon we re-enter the house. They uncuff our hands and seat us side by side on dining room chairs re-arranged in a row against the glass French doors that lead to the patio. Paul adjusts his ninja robe and sits in the corner next to the bay window. Outside, two men in black are combing through the backyard. One of them tramples my full-bloom impatiens. My gaze is interrupted when the head agent hands Paul a thick document.

“You’re not under arrest,” he says. “You can leave anytime, but we’ll be conducting the search with or without you present.” Search for *what?* I am too paralyzed to ask.

Paul reads the first page then tucks the document under his right leg out of my reach. I scan his face for clues. “We’ll stay,” he says. He will miss an important new client presentation this morning.

The agent addresses Grace who, at almost thirty, appears much younger. “Do you have somewhere to be, like school?” She shakes her head no. He looks at Abby. “And you?” She shrugs, regarding him with some defiance.

“What about you?” he says to me.

There’s a volunteer board meeting I’m supposed to chair at ten o’clock. “No,” I say.

We remain in our chairs, compliant, witnessing this invasion of our home. After several minutes, the head agent addresses me again.

“Which computer is yours, Mrs. Kaplan?”

“Please,” I say with a lisp. I take out my mouth guard. “Please...I’m worried about our dogs. They’re hiding somewhere, maybe in a bedroom closet.”

“Or under a bed,” says Abby.

“Carter, find the dogs,” the head agent says to a junior agent standing nearby. “Your computer, Mrs. Kaplan?”

“It’s the HP on the desk to the right.” I point toward the office.

“You have one too?” he says to Grace.

“Her laptop is in her bedroom and so is hers,” I say, referring to Abby.

The house feels cold despite the rising temperature outside. Grace is mouthing words I can’t decipher. I lean in to listen but sit up when Agent Carter arrives with Jake in one arm and Cassie, our long haired chihuahua, tucked under the other. He’s managed wrap each dog in a blanket from the guest room.

“Found them both in a closet. They’re kinda scared,” says Carter as he hands me Jake and a blanket.

“They don’t like strangers with guns,” Abby says in a low voice. Carter cracks a sliver of a smile. He hands Cassie to her and gives Grace the other blanket. Cassie whines and claws at Abby’s chest.

“She needs her crate, Mom.”

Carter looks at me. “It’s in one of the back bedrooms,” I say.

He walks away and I see two men across the room, carrying the metal cases from outside toward the kitchen, probably to the office. Other agents are combing through our open-plan dining room, living room and den, placing post-it notes on walls, taking photographs. I picture what they might be up to in rooms out of sight. Maybe going through my clothes and jewelry, but they seem more interested in electronics.

Moments later, Carter reappears with Cassie’s crate. “Is this what you wanted?” he says, placing it in front of Abby. She nods and puts Cassie inside.

Wrapped in our shared blankets, the three of us remain quiet, exchanging glances as the agents roam through the house. Paul sits on my right, stoic and still. *Why is avoiding eye contact when he should be reassuring me that this is not as bad as it seems?*

Carter is drawn to our Hindu statues. “You sure have a lot of these,” he says. Two or three are valuable art pieces and others are junk. Accumulating them had been one of Paul’s preoccupations. He was always proud of his finds, so I’d made room for them like a dutiful curator. Quantity over quality I always thought, but never said that.

Carter points to one of the larger brass figures. “She’s riding a tiger,” he says.

I’m feeling weak, craving caffeine. “That’s Durga, Mother of the Universe, Protector of All,” I say.

“Tough lady, I guess,” he says.

“She’s a warrior, among other things.” *How did I end up making small talk about Hindu goddesses with this young FBI agent who could be cast as a version of himself in a TV crime show?* He isn’t my new best friend. Then it occurs to me...be polite...maybe he’ll let you get your coffee. Carter examines the statue again.

“Why does she have a rat?”

“Rats can be a symbol of persistence,” I say as I flash on the creature Paul blew away with his BB gun.

“Cool,” says Carter.

“Would it be possible for me to get some coffee?” I ask.

Carter glances at his boss. “I guess it’s okay. I’ll have to take you.”

I transfer Jake to Grace’s lap. As I get up, Paul’s eyes narrow. Is he telling me not to be friendly? Or does he want some coffee too? I decide not to push it.

In the kitchen, the knife set is gone from the counter. Maybe to keep me from stabbing Carter in the back? Night guard in my hand, I pass two agents rummaging through cabinets filled with cookbooks, salad bowls and plastic outdoor patio dishes. Carter watches as I heat milk and add it to strong coffee brewed earlier on a timer.

“Ready?” he says.

I point to a tissue box. He nods. I grab one to wrap up my night guard as we exit the room.

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Time passes. No clock in sight but my stiff back tells me we’ve been sitting too long, de facto prisoners in our own home. Finally, another agent approaches, the dour-looking one with the pock-marked complexion who handcuffed me at the door.

“We need to talk with you, Mrs. Kaplan,” he says. “Come with us.” As I get up without my blanket, Paul gazes out the window.

The agent and a female assistant take me to my bedroom where I sit on a stool they’ve moved from my walk-in closet. She hovers over me as her superior positions himself in a stuffed chair, directly in front of me. He holds a thick document and a stack of papers on his lap.

“Do children live in this house?” he says.

“No,” I say.

“Do children come here to visit? Like, grandchildren?”

“No. We don’t have grandchildren. Only my husband and I live here, with our daughters...most of the time, that is...”

“Who has access to the computers?”

“Which ones?”

“All of them,” he says.

“Well, we...we work from home...so we have desktops in the office. We each have our own laptop and--”

“No one else comes here regularly?”

“My housekeeper...once or twice a week week...but she’s been away and--”

“No, I mean, does anyone else have access to your computers?”

“No...um, I mean, we live a quiet life...not a lot of people visit...usually, that is, well, sometimes a few friends...” I hear myself babbling, perhaps saying too much? And I still don’t know why they are here.

The agent exhales. He places a hand on the documents and pauses. “Have you heard of peer-to-peer sharing?”

“I’m sorry, what?”

He enunciates. “I said, peer-to-peer sharing.”

“Oh...you mean...like Facebook?”

He exchanges looks with the female agent. “No, it’s not social media.” I shift on my stool, feeling naked in my flimsy cotton nightgown. “Mrs. Kaplan...it refers to sites that are accessed through the dark web...we have a lot of forensic evidence...” His voice trails for a moment. He holds up the stack of loose papers, flips through them several at a time. “This is some of the worst we’ve seen, isn’t it, Williams?” She nods, her face grave. He picks out one sheet and offers it to me.

My cheeks are hot. “I don’t...I don’t understand what you’re...”

He withdraws the paper. “Sorry, it’s difficult material. In fact, you may not want to see any of it.” He waves more sheets in the air, a blur of color. “And this is only a tiny fraction of what we downloaded remotely from your husband’s computer. The images and videos are graphic, some are sadistic. Some portray children younger than five.”

I gasp. My head is spinning.

As he reorganizes the papers and writes something down, I establish momentary eye contact with Williams, who hasn’t spoken a word. She’s part of the team, but her demeanor seems more sympathetic. She might be younger than Grace.

“I’m sure you can understand how serious this is, Mrs. Kaplan.” The agent puts down his pen, waits for me to respond.

I stare at him, heart racing, speechless.

“Did you know about this?” I shake my head. He and Williams trade looks again. “Do you have anything to say?”

I want to tell him it can't be true. *No, my husband would never do anything like this.*

That's what I want to say, but no words come out. He rises abruptly.

"Read the search warrant," he says, handing me a copy, ending the interview.

He leaves me alone with Williams and I start to tremble. "I need to use the bathroom," I say, feeling dizzy. I'm not sure I can move.

"Of course," she says. "I'll help you."

She's tall, a muscular girl, so I lean on her as she walks me to the master bath door. I enter and try to close it, but she catches the handle. "Sorry ma'am it has to stay open."

Sitting on the toilet I can see her in the mirror, which means she can see me too. But her eyes are averted, perhaps to show respect for my already compromised privacy.

"Is there anything else you need?" she says when I walk out.

"Yes, my robe...and some underwear."

Williams leads me into my closet. When I put my hands on a dresser drawer, she blocks me with her body. "I'll do it," she says.

I point to a pair of pink cotton briefs. She hands them to me, and I slip them on under my nightgown.

"Where's your robe?" she says.

"There...the white one behind you."

She takes it from the hanger, checks the pockets. "Sorry," she says. "I need to take you back now, Mrs. Kaplan."

In the dining room, seated next to Paul again, questions are swirling. I'm desperate to talk to him, but the lead agent interrupts. "Mr. Kaplan, we need to see you in private."

Paul gets up and follows him. Seconds later, almost out of the room, he stops short. “I want to call my lawyer.” *Lawyer? There’s no “my lawyer” in our database, not that kind of lawyer.*

“Get Mr. Kaplan his cell phone,” the head guy tells another agent. Paul disappears with them and I rewrap the blanket tight around my body.

“Mom...what is this shit?” whispers Abby.

Grace shushes her. “Not now.” They both sit upright as Carter approaches.

“Which one of you has the room with the posters?” he says.

“It’s mine,” says Abby.

“Where’d you find the Bowie ones? They’re vintage, right?”

“I’m in the business,” she says, wary.

“Like, what? You sell posters?”

“I’m a singer-songwriter.”

“Cool,” says Carter. “Would I know your music?” He seems sincere, like he’s trying to assure these pretty age-mates he’s a good guy just doing his job.

This gives me a chance to grab the search warrant I left on the dining room table. I skim through the opening pages...legal language, the order to enter our house signed by a judge...references to illegal materials downloaded and shared by a user at Paul’s IP address. Then more pages filled with sickening references to children being abused and photographed by anonymous predators. I squint at the words. I sense Carter’s eyes on me.

“I need my glasses,” I say.

“Can I get them for you, ma’am?”

“Thank you, there’s a pair on the kitchen counter.”

My glasses enlarge the words, “...*multiple downloads...thousands of images and videos...lewd, violent acts against minors...pre-pubescent girls and boys...tortured children younger than five...*” I feel nauseated but am compelled to read more. There are short excerpts from chatroom conversations between a person with a screen I.D. that could be Paul and others with creepy made-up names. Heart pounding in my throat, I place the document back on the table. Just then, Paul returns to his chair next to me. He has changed into casual pants and a golf shirt. I stare into his vacant eyes and wait. He says nothing.

“*What the fuck?*” I finally hiss.

“I’m ruined,” he says. “I did this.”

CHAPTER 2 SATURDAY MORNING

“I was on heavy doses of hydrocodone,” says Paul when we meet with a defense attorney at ten-thirty on Saturday morning. Paul swears that none of the images he downloaded and shared were created or bought or sold by him, that he never contacted or harmed a child.

“And all this activity coincided with your back operation?” says Dan Meyerhof while his associate, Josh Miller, writes on a legal pad behind us on a sofa.

“It was like I was watching myself do it,” Paul says. “I have no interest in that anymore...it’s disgusting. Lydia can tell you, I was in a fog.”

Dan and Josh look to me for confirmation. “He wasn’t himself for a few months,” I say.

“No, honey, for much longer than that,” says Paul. “The back problems kept getting worse, even after I had the cyst removed. I also had the shoulder operation the year before and the wrist surgery before that.”

“So, these health issues...how long did they go on?” says Dan.

“At least a year and a half,” says Paul.

“And your doctors had you on pain killers the whole time?”

Paul reads the doubt on my face. “Well...off and on, I suppose.” He’d been plagued with debilitating back pain but we both knew he’d usually try to tough it out rather than risk opioid-induced fuzzy thinking. The last time I saw them, the bottles of hydrocodone were almost full.

Dan leans forward over a stack of files on his desk. “So, you’re saying that this activity represents a temporary aberration in your behavior?”

“Absolutely,” says Paul.

Dan pages through the search warrant on his desk. “According to this, you downloaded tens of thousands of images over the last several months.”

“And I never opened most of them. How could I? Not enough time...I’m not sure why...I was, I don’t know...collecting. I couldn’t get enough, I guess.”

Dan fans through the document again. “They were tracking you that morning, from a van parked outside your house. Up to the moment they knocked on the door.”

“Can you believe that?” Paul’s indignation surprises both men. The room is quiet. Paul continues. “Seriously, Dan, Lydia can tell you, a lot of important people will vouch for me.”

My preference for a low-key lifestyle had been over-shadowed by Paul’s love of self-promotion, his addiction to the fundraising, PR-creating, political-base building world of *pro bono* work. “You gotta give back to get back,” he loved to say, and he added that phrase permanently to his electronic email signature.

Paul drones on about how well-regarded he is as a creative businessman, a kind of all-purpose civic volunteer, loaning out his freelance talents on behalf of clients and non-profits for a growing list of causes and projects, including an appointment by the Mayor to a citywide commission. He is proud to be considered an upstanding member of the community by “those who matter.” He believes his history of good works should rescue him from this debacle.

I sit, barely breathing, as day-old images replay in my head. Handcuffed at gunpoint, removed from my house, blindsided with news I could never imagine. Parting words from the head agent at the end of the five-hour search. “*You aren’t going to hurt yourselves, are you?*” he said as his crew packed up the last of Paul’s confiscated electronics. “*We’ll be fine,*” said Paul, a lie just to get him to leave. Later, checking on Paul to make sure this was true, I peeked through the bathroom door and saw him throwing up in the shower.

Numb and exhausted, my eyes drift to the pricey view from Dan’s second story window. The ocean as backdrop, the busy street below bordered with giant palms suffering from drought,

their yellowing fronds casting shade on wide sidewalks above the beach, crowded year-round with tourists on foot competing with bicycles zipping past. Pockets of homeless people camped on the grass seem more numerous and despondent than when we started coming here as young parents almost thirty years ago, pushing Grace in her stroller on breezy summer mornings, sipping drinks purchased on the pier. Cheap entertainment. A less complicated life documented with snapshots developed at the drugstore, placed in photo albums assembled over time, a project I abandoned in the digital age. Much later, Grace and Abby would scour through them for memories to post on social media.

My eyes are closed. *How did I end up in this lawyer's office on this Saturday morning? How could Paul have spent his precious time doing something so repugnant?*

Dan's voice snaps me alert. "Well clearly, you're not a person who would do this. It doesn't add up."

"I know," says Paul. "But I've been trying to...I've been..." He clears his throat. "I can't..." Suddenly, he breaks into tears, bends forward, face in his hands, weeping.

"Oh, my god..." I lean from my seat and touch his arm.

Dan and Josh are stunned as he heaves with sobs, fighting to regain composure.

"Can we get you anything?" say Josh.

Paul takes a long, labored breath. "Sorry...so sorry...shit...I'm so sorry..." He lifts his head. "It's not...I mean, I've never..." He starts to bawl again, unleashing a high-pitched wail, a sound I've heard from him before, but only in moments of unrestrained laughter.

I pat his back. "You don't have to..."

"No, no, I have to say this." Paul wipes his face with a handkerchief. "There were these boys...they molested me when I was five. They were older guys and they made me follow them

into the woods...I didn't understand...I didn't..." Paul stops. He looks like he's going to vomit.

"I never told anyone."

How did I not know this?

Dan speaks in a gentle voice. "It's okay, we understand. This is a personal issue that, well, it would probably be a good thing to get professional help. Do you have a therapist?"

Paul shakes his head no. To my knowledge, he has never seen any kind of therapist.

"I can give you a reference," says Dan. "He's very experienced. A psychiatrist. My wife's second cousin."

Josh weighs in. "Dan, this isn't a cut and dry situation. There could be a number of mitigating circumstances."

"A lot of pieces to the puzzle," says Dan. "We'll need to dig into case law. Monday I'll call the U.S. Attorney's office, see who they're assigning to the case."

"Maybe we should ask about having this thing moved out of Federal into state jurisdiction," says Josh.

"Why?" says Paul.

"State judges might have more leeway when it comes to this type of crime."

A shiver goes through me. Yes, Paul had committed a crime.

"That would be a crap shoot, but we can try it," says Dan. "Anyway, there's a lot of preliminary research to do in the next few weeks. Neither of you and no one else in your family should talk about this. Not with anyone. It's very important."

Josh leans forward from the sofa. "You guys won't believe this, but Dan and I have dealt with a lot of bad situations and yours is not the worst...not by a long shot. You *will* get through this."

“He’s right,” says Dan, “but I can’t emphasize enough how critical it is not to discuss this with other people, including friends.”

“Got it,” says Paul, wiping his brow.

“I’ll need your medical records immediately,” says Dan. “And if you could come up with a timeline...like how and when you started accessing the material.”

Josh weighs in. “Down the line you should give us a list of your volunteer activities, letters of commendation, awards, things like that.”

“We can start on the medical records right away,” I say.

“Good,” says Dan. “So I’ll need an initial upfront retainer of \$25,000. You can pay half today and the rest in a few days. Hope that works.”

Paul looks at me, stricken. I take out our highest limit credit card and hand it to Dan without asking how much this whole thing could eventually cost.

CHAPTER 3 A WEEKEND OF WAITING

Leaving Meyerhof's office, I feel queasy and want to go home, but Paul needs to eat.

Why does he always turn to food?

"We have to warn the girls," I say. "They shouldn't talk to anyone."

"Stop it," he says. "Nobody knows anything." I flash on the neighbors, the expression on Robyn's face. "We'll get through this," says Paul, "one step at a time. Please, just stay calm." As we walk toward a nearby restaurant, I convince him we should go home to eat.

On the crowded freeway, he drives too fast. Red break lights blink ahead. He knows this unnerves me. "Why didn't you tell me?" I blurt out. He punches on the traffic channel. I click it off. "Why?" I ask again.

"Not now, Lydia," he says.

"But those boys in the woods..."

"Liddy, I can't talk about it. We need to get these lawyers what they want. They know what they're doing. We're going to be okay."

Paul seems to think positive affirmations and a boatload of cash will make this go away.

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"Mom, you should've called us," Abby says, when we walk in the door. She's with Grace in the kitchen.

"I have to lie down," says Paul.

"Dad, wait," says Abby.

"What are we supposed to do?" says Grace.

Abby is stone-faced. "Dad...what did the lawyers say?"

"Mom," says Grace, "are they going to put him in prison?"

My heart is pounding. The idea seems improbable. “Don’t even think that,” I say.

“They could though...couldn’t they?” says Grace to Paul.

“Of course not,” he says.

“But what if they do?” says Abby.

“Abby, stop...I told you...it’ll work out. We have to have faith.”

Abby won’t back down. “Dad...don’t lie to us...”

Paul shifts his stance, pressing on his lower back to ease his chronic spasms. He puts a hand on Grace’s shoulder. “Gracie-bear, I know I’ve let all of you down--”

“Dad, you’re talking to her like she’s five,” says Abby, cutting him off.

“Look, I’m sorry,” he says, “I have to close my eyes.”

Paul walks out of the kitchen, leaving me to respond to their questions when I have almost no answers. I tell them about Paul’s dredged up memory, the boys in the woods. Abby is confused. Grace starts to cry. My mind goes blank. I have nothing more to offer, so I fill the kettle to make us some tea.

That night, miles apart as usual in our king-sized bed, Paul refuses to tell me why he did this unthinkable thing. Instead, he keeps promising to “fix” it. I want to believe him, yet I deserve to know more. *Why can’t he help me understand?* Our life has just exploded and all he will do is turn on recycled CNN news to fill up the space between us. *After so many years, it shouldn’t be this way.* I lay awake until morning trying in vain to wish it all away.

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Sunday morning Paul is making coffee, adding too many beans and too little water to the machine. “You forgot to set this last night,” he says. *Our life is in crisis and he’s complaining about this?*

“That’ll be stronger than you like,” I say.

“You don’t need to control everything, Lydia.” He presses the start button.

I wait through the grinding. “I hope your case is a priority for them.”

“They’re charging us a fortune, so it better be,” he says. Months later, Paul would refer to Dan’s initial retainer as a drop in the bucket.

The Sunday afternoon golf match plays in the background as I try to rest on the sofa with Jake and Cassie by my side. Drained and exhausted, I know that nothing will begin to be resolved until the lawyers call us in the morning. Abby walks in, dressed to go out.

“So, where’s he now? In the office? Hope he’s not using your computer.”

“Stop, Abby,” I say.

“Mom, what are we going to do? I don’t understand. Why did he do this?”

“We’ll figure it out,” I say, sounding like him. “I wish I had answers, but I don’t. Not yet.”

Abby is somber. “Jenny’s picking me up in a minute. She doesn’t know.”

I think about Dan’s instructions. “You can’t say anything.”

Afternoon folds into night. Abby is still out. Grace stays in her room. Paul hides in the office. In the kitchen I find proof that he’s eaten. His comfort food – open jars of peanut butter and jam, a loaf of bread on the counter, dirty dishes and a chocolate milk-stained glass sitting in the sink. I clean up the mess and retreat to the bedroom alone. The weekend is over.

CHAPTER 4 AMBUSHED

“Not till six?” says Paul, sounding strident. “Tell Dan to call my wife’s cell as soon as he can.” It’s Monday morning, forty-eight hours after meeting with the lawyers and they’re both out of the office all day for a court appearance on someone else’s case.

Paul hands me his coffee mug to reheat and punches in another number. “Yeah, hi there, Carrie,” he says in a gravelly voice. “Tell Ken I’m under the weather. Throat infection...uh-huh...so I need to re-schedule.” He coughs for effect. “I’ll check my emails...okay, thanks, bye.” Carrie doesn’t know that, as of Friday afternoon, Paul’s cell phone and computer belong to the FBI. He’ll need to check his emails on my computer.

I hand him his heated coffee. “You need to call the commission office and say you’re sick. Someone else can run the meeting tomorrow.”

“I have to be there,” he says. “And so do you.”

“Oh god, Paul, please, I don’t want to--”

He puts up his hand. “I’ve told you, people don’t know about this. If we don’t show up it’s like letting them win.”

“Who’s them?”

“Come on, Lydia. I was thinking about this all night. I have a good defense. It’s going to be OK. I’m the President of the Commission. It’s my job to be there.” Paul pockets my cell phone and heads for the bedroom to catch up on sleep.

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Tuesday morning, he barges into the bedroom to tell me he’s just spoken with Dan. They don’t know who has the case yet, but they want the balance of the first retainer today.

“Another \$12,500,” says Paul. “How much is left on that card?”

Like a robot, I smooth the comforter he'll muss when he takes his first nap of the day. I'm calculating which cards I will call for a credit line increase.

"Tell me" he says, impatient. "I depend on you for these things."

There's no other immediate option. "Go ahead," I say.

Paul lingers in the room, telling me about research he did on my computer, finding stories about people in legal trouble who used physical impairments as an excuse for their crimes.

"This one woman had a synovial cyst on her spine like mine that hadn't been diagnosed yet. Her lawyer got her probation."

"What did she do, I mean what kind of crime?" I say.

"She embezzled fifty thousand dollars from the school she ran."

"But what does that have to do with what you did?" I say.

"Come on, you know the pain I was in. It changed me. My mind wasn't right. I didn't know what I was doing. I found some other cases, too. This could be important."

He waits at the bedroom door, sensing my doubt. Then reminds me for the third time that he wants to leave for the Commission hearing at 4:30 sharp. He knows I am dreading it.

"Sorry, but I need you there," he says. "We're both good people. It's gonna work out."

* * * *

We arrive at the meeting ten minutes late and I grab the only open seat in the back row of the auditorium. Paul assumes his position on stage in front of an overflow crowd ready to debate neighborhood issues. A small camera crew films as the hearing drags on for three hours.

Finally, Paul adjourns for the night and everyone files out. I stand in the back talking with Carole, another commissioner I've known for a few years. She seems to know nothing about our situation. Paul passes by, leaving the auditorium with some local government types, bantering

about city politics. When Carole and I enter the noisy lobby, we see a man with a microphone and another with a video camera on his shoulder standing with Paul. Glare from the camera's light reflects off Paul's overheated pate.

"Who's that?" I say to Carole.

"Oh, you know...it's that reporter from Channel 3, Jonah Steinberg. He was filming in there. It's not exactly his beat, though."

I move closer. My heart stops. Paul is explaining, on camera, why he downloaded child pornography on his home computer.

"So, you admit it then," says the reporter.

"It's more complicated than it sounds. I'd been suffering from terrible pain and--"

"That's quite an excuse," says Steinberg, interrupting.

"I had a cyst removed from my spine."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"It means a lot," says Paul. "My doctor is sure that--"

"We know you saw a lawyer," says Steinberg. "We followed you from your house."

They've been spying on us. How did they find out?

Horrified, I try to catch Paul's eye, but he's focused on recounting the details of his spine surgery...how he'd been living in a fog...acting under the influence of powerful pain killers.

Steinberg is out for blood. "So, you're saying you were viewing pornographic pictures of children...violent images of babies being tortured...little kids younger than five being sexually abused...because you had a sore back?"

"You're twisting my words," says Paul. "I was in pain. I didn't know what I was doing and--"

“Come on, you’re a smart person, you expect anyone to believe that?” This reporter is relentless, mocking, and Paul is taking the bait. The cameraman zooms his lens.

Carole taps me on the shoulder. “What’s Paul talking about?”

Quickly, I whisper in her ear what happened. She’s aghast, yet immediately responds to my panic. “Get him out of here,” she says.

By then, Paul is in full PR mode, telling his story. Steinberg’s looming frame towers over him, nudging him physically and psychologically into a corner.

“Isn’t that the guy from Channel 3 News?” says one of the neighborhood people to me.

“It’s just an interview,” I say, trying to block his view.

Carole gets his attention. “Hey, Jim,” she says in a loud voice, coaxing him out of earshot. “Make sure you send me that memo.”

Frozen, I watch Paul dig himself in deeper. Carole rushes back. “Stop him,” she says.

I approach the cameraman shooting over Steinberg’s shoulder and tug on the back of his t-shirt. “Please, don’t do this. Please, no more.”

Steinberg wheels around, menacing. “Madam...you may not touch my cameraman.”

I retreat, but Carole eggs me on so I edge in front of Steinberg, my back to the camera, and close in on Paul. My eyes bore into his. “We have to leave,” I say.

A guard interrupts us. “Hey, folks, we’re locking up the building for the night.” He calls to stragglers in the lobby. “Everyone outside.”

Steinberg and the cameraman move toward the exit. Carole and I follow behind with Paul. Outside, people are still milling around on the sidewalk. I try to pull Paul away, but he loosens his arm from my grip and doubles back to confront the reporter. Some people are watching. The cameraman flips on his light.

Steinberg jumps in. “Mr. Kaplan, you’re a family man.” He points at me. “Is this your wife? What does she say?”

“She understands,” says Paul.

The bright beam shines in my eyes. Steinberg moves in with his microphone. “So, what’s your reaction to all this? Do you forgive him?”

The camera is focused on my face. Intimidated, I don’t know what to do.

“Well, do you?” he says.

“Um...” I stare at him, then say reflexively, “Yes...yes, I do.”

“Really?” he says, his tone derisive.

My knees buckle. Carole intervenes. She grabs me by the hand, pulls me away. I expect Paul to follow, but he doesn’t budge, choosing instead to keep defending the indefensible.

Frantic, I motion for him to come.

“Make him stop,” says Carole. I run back to Paul.

“Go to the car, honey,” he says. “It’s okay.”

“No, Paul, we have to go now.” Then I plead with Steinberg. “Please, I’m begging you, don’t put this on TV...give him a chance, first...please.”

The camera light shines in my eyes. Steinberg steps toward me again. “You believe his story? How can you forgive him? Aren’t you a mother? Little children, babies...I don’t get it.”

“He was in so much pain,” I say, not thinking it through.

“You can’t be serious,” he sneers, taunting me to say more. Much later, I would regret this exchange. I should never have allowed him to trap me.

“That’s enough,” Carole says, pulling on my sleeve, guiding me away. When Paul catches up, she grabs him with her other arm and leads us to the car. “Paul, can you drive?”

“Of course,” he says, defiant.

Carole takes me to the passenger side, opens the door, and I collapse against her body.

“Lydia...oh my god...let me give you something. I have a Xanax in my purse.”

I shake my head no. I’d never taken drugs like that. She helps me into the car and over her shoulder, on the other side of the parking lot, I catch a glimpse of Steinberg and the cameraman loading their equipment into a news van. She closes the door.

“Give me your phone. I gotta call Dan,” says Paul, pressing the ignition button. He revs the gas with a heavy foot while still in park. Carole jumps to the side.

“Are you sure he can drive?” she shouts at me through my closed window.

Suddenly, without checking the rearview, Paul backs up, then lurches forward into the busy street, careening over a steep curb.

“Shit,” I yell, “slow down!”

“Don’t tell me what to do,” he yells, running a red light. “They could follow us!”

My throat is clamped shut. “Paul--”

He shoves the phone back in my hand. “Call Dan and put him on speaker. And calm down, will you?” He swerves into the right lane, accelerating toward the freeway entrance.

I raise my voice. “*Listen to me!* You heard what he said.”

“Who?” he says as he speeds down the ramp.

“The reporter. Didn’t you hear him?”

“Hear *what?*” he says.

“Paul...they already know where we live.”

SYNOPSIS: THE WRONG HOUSE

What if you discovered the person you'd been married to for forty years had a secret life?

In 2011, the FBI, armed with guns and a search warrant, banged on our door. My husband, two adult daughters and I were handcuffed and placed under guard in the front yard of our suburban home as dog walkers gawked and neighbors cruised by. A dozen agents in bullet-proof vests executed a weapons sweep of the house before bringing us inside.

This had to be a mistake, I thought, during the five-hour search of our home -- until I discovered why they were there, and my husband's hidden obsession was exposed. Within days, leaked details appeared in the press.

We were in our early sixties. Our marriage, while not perfect, had been comfortable and settled. Now everything I'd taken for granted was in jeopardy. Blindsided, my shock turned into denial and I stood by him as we depleted all our resources to keep him out of jail.

Sixteen months later, I watched the man I thought I knew for four decades sentenced in a plea bargain to seven years in Federal prison.

At first, I focused on immediate problems – bills, insurmountable debt, lawsuits, selling my home and getting rid of most everything in it. I was devastated. He'd committed a despicable crime and I was haunted by unanswered questions. I filed for divorce.

"How could she not have known?" people asked early on, behind my back. The answer? He'd given me no clues. Hiding in shame, my outrage grew, along with my need to express it. I decided to confront the chaos by writing a novel based on the events, using a pseudonym.

I took a ten-week course called, "Writing the Healing Story." Reading my first pages out loud was cathartic. The teacher said that what I was writing was memoir, but I insisted it was a novel and almost quit the class. Fortunately, she encouraged me to stay.

Months later, I joined my writing teacher's literary group and read newer pages to fellow writers. For two years, I wrote and rewrote the novel, avoiding details that might reveal my identity. As I dug deeper, though, I found myself writing vivid scenes I remembered almost verbatim. That is what resonated with listeners. I concluded it was time to cut out the fiction and tell my version of the truth.

Self-doubt crept in. Did I have the courage to expose myself in this way? My life had been drastically up-ended...so what? The world is full of tragedy. But other writers' reactions spurred me on: "*What did you do? How did you feel? What kind of man does that?*"

Viewing my past through such a disrupted lens, I needed to become a detective to re-write the narrative. Why did this happen? What led to the betrayal of trust? What is the meaning of loyalty and the nature of forgiveness? This is a memoir, the story of how my world collapsed and what I did to survive.