



Never Lie

A NOVEL BY

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EPILOGUE

PROLOGUE

ADRIENNE

Everybody lies.

Years ago, a psychological experiment was devised to estimate the prevalence of untruthful behavior. It involved a broken vending machine.

Subjects were informed that the vending machine was malfunctioning.

If they put in a dollar, the faulty machine would dispense candy, but then return their dollar. Subjects who used the vending machine found this to be absolutely true. They dispensed one, two, three, or even four pieces of free candy, and then retrieved their money from the machine.

There was a sign on the vending machine. The sign read: “To report any malfunctions with this machine, please call this number.” Unbeknownst to the subjects, the number provided belonged to one researcher in the study.

Take a guess how many of the subjects called this number to report the broken machine.

Zero.

That’s right. Not even one of the dozens of subjects was honest enough

to call the number and report the broken vending machine. Each one of them took their free candy and moved on.

As I said, everybody lies.

There are many easily identified signs that a person is lying, especially if they are an unskilled liar. As a trained psychiatrist, I am intimately familiar with these signs. It's almost too easy to spot them:

Liars fidget.

The tone of their voice or speech patterns changes.

Liars offer too much information, babbling on with excessive detail to convince themselves or others of what they are saying.

Machines have been built to recognize these patterns and identify them.

However, even the best lie detector has a twenty-five percent rate of error. I am far more accurate than that.

If you listen to the audiotapes of my patient encounters, you can't always tell. On tape, you miss the important visual cues. Avoiding eye contact, for example, or covering their mouth or eyes. But if you are my patient, and you are sitting in my office talking to me, I can watch your face and your gestures and listen to the pitch of your voice.

I will know the truth. I always know.

Never lie to me.

CHAPTER 1

TRICIA

Present Day

We're hopelessly lost and my husband won't admit it.

I can't say this is atypical behavior for Ethan. We've been married for six months—still newlyweds—and ninety percent of the time, he's the perfect husband. He knows all the most romantic restaurants in town, he still surprises me with flowers, and when he asks me about my day, he actually listens to my answer and asks appropriate follow-up questions. But the other ten percent of the time, he is so stubborn, I could scream.

"You missed the turn for Cedar Lane," I tell him. "We passed it like half a mile down the road."

"No." A scary-looking vein bulges in Ethan's neck. "It's up ahead. We didn't pass it."

I let out a frustrated huff as I clutch the printed directions to the house in Westchester, courtesy of our real estate agent, Judy. Yes, we do have GPS. But that signal went out about ten minutes ago. Now all we've got to rely on are these written directions. It's like living in the Stone Age.

Well, Ethan wanted something out of the way. He's getting his wish.

The worst part is that it's *snowing*. It started a few hours ago, back when

we were leaving Manhattan. When we left, they were cute little white flakes that evaporated on contact with the ground. Over the last hour, the flakes have quadrupled in size. They're not cute anymore.

And now that we have turned off the highway, this more deserted, narrow road is slick with snow. And it's not like Ethan drives a truck. His BMW has gorgeous hand-stitched leather seats, but only front-wheel drive. And he's not incredibly skilled at driving in the snow either. If we skidded, he probably wouldn't even know whether to turn *into* the skid or *out* of the skid. (Into the skid, right?)

As if on cue, the BMW skids on a patch of slushy ice. Ethan's fingers are bloodless on the steering wheel. He rights the vehicle, but my heart is pounding. The snow is getting really bad. He pulls over to the side of the road and holds out his hand to me.

"Let me see those directions."

Dutifully, I hand over the slightly crumpled piece of paper. I wish he had let me drive. Ethan would never admit I'm better at navigating than he is. "I think we passed the turn, Ethan."

He looks down at a sheet of typed directions. Then he squints out the windshield. Even with the wipers going full speed and our high beams on, the visibility is horrible. Now that the sun has dropped in the sky, we can

only see about ten feet ahead of us. Everything past that is pure white. “No. I see how to get there.”

“Are you sure?”

Instead of answering my question, he grumbles, “You should have checked the weather before we got on the road.”

“Maybe we should turn back?” I press my hands between my knees.

“We can view the house another time.” Like when there isn’t a freaking blizzard raging outside the car.

My husband whips his head around and glares at me like I have lost my mind. “Tricia, we’ve been driving for almost *two hours* to get here. We’re about ten minutes away, and now you want to *turn around and go home*?”

That’s another thing I have learned about Ethan in the six months since we’ve been married. Once he gets an idea in his head to do something, he does not back down until it’s done. I suppose I could see it as a good thing. I wouldn’t want to be married to a man who left a bunch of half-finished projects around the house.

I’m still learning about Ethan. All my girlfriends scolded me for marrying him too quickly. We met in a coffee shop one day—I tripped and spilled my drink right next to his table, and he insisted on buying me a new one.

It was one of those love at first sight deals. When I saw him, I fell hard for his blond hair streaked with even blonder strands. His blue eyes were the color of the sky on a clear day and rimmed with pale lashes. And his strong Roman nose kept him from being too pretty. When he smiled at me, I was a goner. We spent the next six hours together, sharing coffee, then later that same evening, he took me out to dinner. That night, I broke up with my boyfriend of over a year, explaining apologetically that I had met the man I was going to marry.

Nine months later, my Coffee Shop Romeo and I were married. Six months later, we're moving out to the suburbs. Our entire relationship has been on fast forward.

But so far, no regrets. The more I learn about Ethan, the more I fall in love with him. And he feels the same way about me. It's so amazing sharing my life with him.

Except for the one big secret he doesn't know about yet.

"Fine," I say. "Let's find the house."

Ethan hands me the sheet of directions. He throws the BMW back into drive. "I know exactly where to go. It's right up ahead."

That remains to be seen.

He drives slower this time, both to account for the snow and to keep

from missing the turn, which I'm certain that he already missed about half a mile down the road. I keep my eyes on the road as well even though the windshield is now caked with snow. I try to think warm, dry thoughts.

"There!" Ethan cries. "I see it!"

I lean forward in my seat, straining the seatbelt. He *sees* it? Sees *what*, exactly? Is he wearing invisible snow/night vision goggles? Because all I can see is snow, and then beyond that, more snow, and beyond *that*, blackness. But then he slows down, and sure enough, there's a little path leading into a wooded area. He turns the high beams in the direction of a sign that's almost obscured by snow. I can just barely make out the words as he takes the turn just a bit too fast.

Cedar Lane.

What do you know—Ethan was right all along. I was sure he had passed the turn for Cedar, but he hadn't. It's right here. Although now that we're on the tiny narrow road to get to the house, I am concerned the BMW won't make it. When I look over at my husband's face, I can tell he is worried about the same thing. The path to the house is barely paved, and now it's thick with snow.

"We should tell Judy to keep the showing quick," I say. "We don't want to get stuck here."

Ethan bobs his head in agreement. “I have to be honest. I wanted something out-of-the-way, but this is insane. I mean, it’s like we’re in the middle of...”

His voice trails off mid-sentence. I can only imagine he was going to point out that we are in the middle of nowhere. But before he can get out the words, his mouth falls open. Because the house has finally come into view.

And it’s unbelievable.

The listing on Judy’s website mentioned that it’s two stories tall, plus an attic, but that description doesn’t do justice to this sprawling estate. The ceilings must be extremely high, because the steep gable roof of the house seems to scrape against the sky, heavy with snow. The sides of the house are lined with pointed arch windows that give the house a look of a cathedral rather than a place where people live. Ethan’s jaw looks like it might unhinge.

“Jesus,” he breathes. “Can you imagine *living* in a place like that?”

I may know my husband for only just over a year, but I recognize the look on his face. He’s not asking a rhetorical question. He *wants* to live in this house. We have dragged poor Judy across half of Westchester and Long Island, because no place we have seen has quite lived up to the picture

Ethan has in his head. But now...

“You like it?” I say.

“Don’t you think it’s great? I mean, look at the place.”

I open my mouth to agree with him. This house is undeniably beautiful.

It’s huge and elegant and remote—all the things we have been searching for. It’s a perfect home to fill up with children, which is our eventual goal. I want to tell Ethan that I love the house as much as he does. That when Judy arrives, we should make her an offer on the spot.

But I can’t do that.

Because as I stare out at this sprawling estate, a sick feeling comes over me. So sick that I cover my mouth and take a deep breath to keep from losing my lunch all over the BMW's expensive upholstery. I have never felt this way before. Not about any of the dozens of empty houses we have toured over the last couple of months. I have never had a feeling this strong.

Something terrible has happened in this house.

“Oh crap,” Ethan says.

I take another shaky breath, pushing away another wave of nausea.

That’s when I notice we have stopped moving. The front wheels spin determinedly, but it’s no use. The car is stuck.

“The roads are too slippery,” he says. “We can’t get any traction.”

I hug myself and shiver, even though the heat is blasting. “What should we do?”

“Well...” He reaches out to wipe some condensation off the windshield.

“We’re pretty close to the house. We can walk it.”

Easy for him to say. He’s not wearing Manolo Blahnik boots.

“Also, it looks like Judy is already here,” he adds.

“Really? I don’t see her car.”

“Yeah, but the lights are on. She must be parked in the garage.”

I squint through the fogged windshield at the house. Now that I’m looking closer, I can see a single light aglow in one of the upstairs windows.

That’s odd. If a real estate agent were showing a house, wouldn’t she turn the lights on *downstairs*? But the entire first floor of the house is dark.

There’s only that one light upstairs.

Once again, I shiver.

“Come on,” Ethan says. “We’re better off inside. It’s not like we can spend the night in the car. We’ll run out of gas and freeze to death.”

Not an appealing thought. I’m starting to regret this entire trip. What was I thinking coming out here? But Ethan loves the house. Maybe this will all work out.

“Fine,” I say. “Let’s walk.”

CHAPTER 2

Oh my God, it's so cold.

As soon as I open the passenger's side door to the BMW, I deeply regret agreeing to walk to the house. I'm wearing my Ralph Lauren wool coat that goes down to my knees, but I may as well be wearing a sheet of paper because the wind seems to go right through me, even when I pull up my hood.

But the worst part is my feet. I am wearing leather boots, but they're not really *snow* boots, if you know what I mean. They add a much-appreciated three inches to my height, and they look gorgeous with skinny blue jeans, but they do absolutely nothing to protect my feet from the foot of snow now surrounding them.

Why oh why did I buy a pair of stylish boots that have no ability to function as boots? I'm starting to deeply regret all of my life choices at the moment. My mother always said not to leave the house in shoes you can't walk a mile in.

"You okay, Tricia?" Ethan asks. "You're not cold, are you?"

He crinkles his forehead, perplexed by my chattering teeth and lips that are slowly turning blue. He's wearing the black ski jacket he bought last month, and although I can't see his feet, I'm fairly sure *his* boots are big

and warm. I want to wring his neck for making me do this, but that would involve taking my hands out of my deep pockets and would probably result in frostbite, because unlike him, I don't have gloves. I must admit—the man came more prepared than I did.

“I'm a bit cold,” I reply. “My boots aren't snowproof.”

Ethan looks down at his own footwear, then back up at me. After a moment of consideration, he tromps around the side of the car, then crouches down beside me. “Okay, hop on my back.”

Forget everything I said. I love my husband. Truly.

He gives me a piggyback ride along the rest of the path, past the FOR SALE sign on the snow-covered front lawn, and all the way to the front door. The porch has been largely shielded from the snow, and that's where he carefully lowers me onto the ground. He shakes snowflakes out of his now damp blond hair and blinks droplets of water from his eyelashes.

“Thank you.” I smile at him, giddy with affection for my strong, handsome husband. “You're my hero.”

“My pleasure.” And then he bows. *Swoon*. I'm loving this honeymoon phase of our marriage.

Ethan pulls off his wool gloves and presses his thumb against the doorbell. We hear the chimes ringing out throughout the house, but after

several moments of waiting, no footsteps are coming to the door to let us in.

The other strange thing is that the first floor of the house is completely dark. We both saw that light on upstairs, so we assumed someone was home. We assumed it was Judy. But if Judy were here, she would be downstairs, wouldn't she? She wouldn't be upstairs in a random bedroom. The first floor of the house is dead silent.

"Maybe the owners are home," Ethan says, straining his neck to look up at the towering estate.

"Maybe..."

But there's another strange thing about all this. There's no car on the property. Not that I can see anyway. Of course, in a snowstorm, the owner's car would likely be tucked away in the garage. Judy likely wouldn't park in the garage, so the fact that her car isn't visible is evidence that she hasn't arrived.

Ethan rings the doorbell again while I pull my phone out of my purse.

"There are no messages from Judy," I report. "Although my signal went out at least twenty minutes ago, so it's possible she's trying to contact us now."

He digs his own phone out of his pocket and frowns down at the screen.

"I don't have any signal either."

We still hear only silence coming from the house. Ethan walks over to

the window next to the door and cups his hands over his eyes to see inside.

He shakes his head.

“There definitely isn’t anybody on the first floor. I’m not convinced there’s anyone here at all.” He shrugs. “Maybe Judy left the light on upstairs the last time she was here.”

That doesn’t sound like Judy. Judy Teitelbaum is the consummate professional. She’s been showing houses since before I was born, and every place she has shown us has been immaculate. She must scrub them down herself. I’m afraid to even touch anything when I’m in one of the houses for a showing. If I put down a drink without a coaster, I might give Judy a stroke. So no, I don’t think she would leave the house with an upstairs light on. But I’m struggling to come up with another explanation.

Ethan tugs at the collar of his puffy jacket while I hug myself for warmth. “Well, I don’t know what to do. She’s obviously not here.”

I let out a frustrated sigh. “Great. So what are we supposed to do?”

“Hang on...” His eyes drop to the mat below our feet—the word “welcome” is written in elaborate script, partially obscured by the snow.

“Maybe there’s a spare key around here somewhere.”

There isn’t one under the welcome mat—that would be far too obvious—but a more thorough search turns up a key concealed beneath a potted

plant near the door. The key is ice cold and slightly damp in my palm.

“So...” I raise my eyebrows at Ethan. “Should we go inside without her? Do you think that’s okay?”

“We better. Who knows how long she’s going to be, and it’s freezing out here.” He throws an arm protectively around my shoulders. “I don’t want you to catch pneumonia.”

He’s right. With no cell phone signal and with the car getting increasingly buried in the snow, we need shelter. At least in the house, we’ll be safe.

I fit the key in the lock and hear the lock turn. I place my hand on the doorknob, which is freezing cold under my palm. I attempt to twist the knob, but the door doesn’t budge. Damn. I look down at the key, still wedged in the lock. “Do you think there’s a deadbolt?”

“Let me try.”

I step back to let Ethan have a go at it. He jiggles the key a bit, then he tries the knob. Nothing. He steps back for a moment, then grips the doorknob again and throws his entire weight against the heavy wooden door. With a loud creaking sound, the door pops open.

“You did it!” *My hero. Swoon.*

The house is pitch black inside. Ethan flicks a switch on the wall, and

my stomach sinks when nothing happens. But then the overhead lights flicker for a moment before coming to life. The power is on, thank God. The lighting is dim—several of the bulbs have probably blown out—but it’s enough to illuminate the expansive living space.

And my jaw drops.

First of all, the living room is huge, and it seems even larger with the open floor plan. After living in a Manhattan apartment for the last several years, almost every house seems enormous to us. But this one is *museum-*level enormous. It’s *airport-*level enormous. And as large as the square footage is, it seems so much larger because of the high ceilings.

“Jesus,” Ethan breathes. “This place is incredible. It’s like a cathedral.”

“Yes.”

“And the asking price is so *low*. This house looks like it should be worth four times as much as that.”

Even as I nod my head in agreement with him, I get another wave of that sick feeling. *Something terrible has happened in this house.*

“There could be mold,” he says thoughtfully. “Or the foundation is crap.

We should have the place inspected by someone really good before we sign anything.”

I don’t respond to that. I don’t tell him I’m secretly hoping this place is

infested with mold or crumbling at the base or some other reason that I can say no to living here without sounding like some crazy woman who won't buy a house her husband loves because she has *a bad feeling* about it.

And there's something else strange about this house.

It's completely furnished. The living room has a sectional sofa, a loveseat, a coffee table, and bookcases filled to the brim with books. I walk over to the beautiful brown leather sectional sofa and run my finger along one of the cushions. The leather feels stiff, like nobody has used the cushions in ages, and my finger comes away black. Dust—years' worth of it.

Some of the houses we've seen have been furnished because the owners were still living there, but those houses looked lived in. This house doesn't. There are multiple layers of dust on every piece of furniture in the living room. Yet this furniture isn't the kind that somebody would leave behind when they moved. That leather couch probably cost somewhere in the order of five figures. And who leaves behind every single one of their books? The floor looks dusty too, like nobody has walked on it in a long time. When I lift my eyes, I notice thick cobwebs in every corner of the living room. I can almost imagine the spiders crawling through those webs, waiting to sink their fangs into me.

It's also more evidence that Judy has not been here. There's no way Judy would leave a house this dusty. And cobwebs? Not a chance. It's against her religion.

I turn to Ethan, about to point this out, but he's distracted by something.

A gigantic portrait of a woman hanging over the mantle. He is staring up at it, a strangely dark look on his face.

"Hey," I say. "What's wrong?"

His pale eyelashes flutter. He seems surprised that I'm suddenly standing next to him, as if he had forgotten I was here. "Oh. Uh, nothing. I just... who do you think that is?"

I follow his gaze up to the portrait. It's gigantic—larger than life. And the woman featured in the portrait is striking. There's no other word for her—she's the sort of woman who, if you saw her on the street, you would stop and do a double take. She looks to be in her mid-thirties, with pin-straight hair that falls just below her shoulders. At first, I would have called her hair auburn, but when I tilt my head to the side, it morphs into a brilliant shade of red. Her skin is pale and flawless, but I suppose anyone can have beautiful skin in a painting. But one of her most striking features is her vivid green eyes. So many people have green eyes flecked with brown or blue, but hers are such an intense shade of green that they seem like they

could leap off the canvas.

“Maybe she lived here?” I suggest.

Ethan’s lips twist into a sneer. “What kind of arrogant, self-obsessed person would put a gigantic painting of herself over the fireplace?”

“You mean you don’t want me to put a giant painting of myself on the wall in our new home?” I tease him.

Ethan flashes me a withering smile. Something about the painting has disturbed him, and he doesn’t seem like he wants to talk about it.

I wander over to the bookcase near the fireplace, still wearing my wool coat because it’s far too cold to remove it. Whoever lived here must’ve loved to read because there are multiple bookcases scattered throughout the room, all nearly overflowing with books. I glance at some titles on the shelves, in case we are stuck here for a while and I need something to entertain me. There’s an entire shelf containing books with the exact same title.

The Anatomy of Fear.

A little shiver goes down my spine, and I hug my coat to my chest. I pluck one of the many hardcover titles off the shelf, which has a layer of dust on it, like everything else in the house. *The Anatomy of Fear* by Adrienne Hale, MD, PhD. And there’s a picture of a dripping knife on the

cover. Great. Exactly what I want to see right now.

I flip the book around. There are a few choice quotes from well-known authors and professionals praising the book. And in the left-hand lower corner, there's a photograph of the author. It's the same picture that's hanging over the mantle.

"Ethan," I say. "Look at this."

He rips his eyes away from the portrait and joins me by the bookcase.

He looks over my shoulder at the photograph on the back of the book.

"Adrienne Hale," he reads off the back cover. "Isn't she that shrink who got murdered?"

He's right. Three years ago, the disappearance of Dr. Adrienne Hale was one of the biggest stories in the news. Especially since it happened shortly after the release of her pop psychology hit, which stayed on the *New York Times* bestseller list for almost a year, hogging the number one spot for months. Everyone in the country read that book, including yours truly. Of course, the massive success of the book was largely because her disappearance was such a sensational story.

"She disappeared," I correct him. "I don't think they ever found her body."

He tugs the hardcover out of my hands and flips through the pages. "I

bet they did eventually find her. Washed up somewhere.”

“Maybe.” Adrienne Hale disappeared from the news cycle at least two years ago, and her book dropped off the charts as well. “You read it, didn’t you?”

His eyes are still on the pages in front of him as he shakes his head. “I hate that pop psychology crap.”

“No, it was really good.” I poke a finger at the open pages in his hand.

“It’s all about her patients, you know? The horrible experiences they went through and how they dealt with it.”

“Yeah, not interested.” He rests the book on top of a random shelf, suddenly bored with it. Ethan isn’t much of a reader. “Her boyfriend killed her, right? I remember that part. He was some tech guy or something.”

“They accused him but I don’t think he went to jail for it.”

“He probably did it though.”

“Probably.” I nod. “There are a lot of crazy men out there.”

He grabs my hand and pulls me toward him so I can feel his hot breath on my cheek. “Aren’t you glad I saved you from all those jerks?”

I roll my eyes, but he’s not entirely wrong. I’ve dated some jerks in the past. Nobody who was homicidal like Dr. Adrienne Hale’s boyfriend, but I had a guy once cheat on me with my best friend. It was almost a cliché.

Ethan, on the other hand, has been incredibly loyal during the time we've been together. He never even looks at other women, even though they look at him all the time.

"You think this is her house then?" I ask. "Dr. Adrienne Hale?"

"Probably." He glances up at the portrait again. "That or somebody who was dangerously obsessed with her."

Even though I'm wearing my coat, I'm still freezing. I rub my arms for warmth. If we're here much longer, maybe we can figure out how to turn on the heat. Ethan is good at stuff like that. "Wouldn't it bother you to live in the home of a dead woman?"

"Not really." He shrugs. "Everyone dies eventually, right? So unless we buy a brand new house, you're kind of guaranteed somebody has lived in it who's now dead. So what?"

Fun new facts I'm learning about my husband of six months: he does *not* have a spiritual side.

I skim my eyes over at the bookcase, resting them on the book Ethan casually tossed on top of the shelf. Somehow, it feels like Adrienne Hale wouldn't like him messing with her bookshelf—like he disturbed the energy in the house. I take the book and replace it on the shelf where it was before. Hopefully, that appeases her ghost temporarily, even if her killer is still out

there somewhere.

My stomach lets out an embarrassing growl. “When do you think Judy will be here? I’m starving.”

“I have no idea.” He looks down at his Rolex. “Let me double check if her car is in the garage.”

While Ethan goes off in search of the door to the garage, my gaze drops to the floor beneath my feet. The wood is so filthy that I’d be reluctant to walk barefoot here—the soles of my feet would almost certainly turn black. But as I look down at the floor in the flickering overhead lights, I notice a change in the dust pattern near the bookcase. It almost looks like...

A footprint.

I creep over to get a closer look, squinting in the dim lighting. It definitely looks like a footprint. I put my own boot next to the print— whoever made the footprint had feet quite a lot larger than mine. Could it be Ethan’s footprint? It looks about the right size, but I didn’t see him standing over here.

“The garage is empty.” Ethan emerges from a door near the kitchen, brushing what looks like a cobweb off his shoulder. “Judy’s not here.”

I shiver, even with my coat still on. “Hey, come look at this.”

Ethan walks over to me, and I recognize that the two of us are creating

new footprints everywhere we go. “What? What’s wrong?”

“Is this a footprint?”

He narrows his eyes at the dust pattern on the floor. “Maybe?”

“So who made it?”

“I don’t know. Judy?”

I raise my eyebrows. “You think Judy wears size ten men’s shoes?”

Ethan lets out a breath, and I swear I can see the puff of air in the frigid living room. “Then maybe it was someone else viewing the house.”

Except there’s no way Judy was showing anyone a house this dusty. My eyes scan the floor, but I don’t see any other footprints as noticeable as these. “When do you think Judy will get here?”

He frowns. “I don’t know if Judy is going to make it, Tricia.”

“She wouldn’t stand us up.”

“Yeah, but there’s a blizzard out there. We barely made it and the snow is just getting worse. Honestly, it was irresponsible of her to even schedule the viewing tonight.”

“So...” I chew on the tip of my thumbnail. “Do you think we could be stuck here? Like, for the night?”

Our heads swivel simultaneously to look over at one of the picture windows. The snow is coming down harder than it’s ever been before. It’s

like a wall of white is being dumped from the sky. Our car is probably buried, and it's not like it was doing so great in the snow before.

"I think we might be," he says. "But don't worry. I mean, look at this place—I bet the kitchen is stocked with food. And even if it isn't, we've got that emergency supply kit you make me keep in the trunk. Doesn't that have a bunch of power bars in it?"

"I... I think so..."

"So let's go get something to eat."

Ethan strides purposefully in the direction of the kitchen. I can't believe he's not even the slightest bit worried, even though we're now trapped in this unfamiliar house full of cobwebs and scary footprints. That's how Ethan is. He's always so confident. I love that about him.

So I follow my new husband to the kitchen. But the whole time, I can't shake the horrible feeling that those green eyes in the portrait over the mantle are watching me.

CHAPTER 3

ADRIENNE

Before

Paige is cursing to herself as she stumbles on a loose brick on the walkway to my front door. I watch her from the window, wondering if I

should call someone to get that brick fixed this week. I don't want somebody to fall on it, shatter their ankle, and then I'm responsible.

Legally, that is. If Paige fell, it would be her own fault. She would have far more stability if she weren't clutching a manila envelope in her right hand and scrolling through the screen on her phone with her left as she teeters in her three-inch heels.

Paige has been my literary agent for the last five years, and I have never seen her without her phone in hand. There's a possibility it has fused to her palm. I have spoken to her in the past and I swear I've heard the shower running in the background. Once, I heard the toilet flush. When we speak, she looks up from the screen to meet my eyes, but only briefly.

Paige tucks the manila envelope under her arm so she can ring the doorbell. It's unnecessary, given I've been monitoring her Audi's trajectory down my driveway, but she doesn't know that. Chimes echo through the house, and I take my time heading to the front door. Paige may be in a rush, but I'm not. I've got the entire morning free before my first patient arrives. Paige has her eyes pinned on her phone screen when I crack open the door. Her usually perfectly highlighted hair is slightly windblown from the drive, but she otherwise looks impeccable in a black silk dress and spiky pumps.