

Chapter Three

She quietly unlocked the door, entered the house, and removed her shoes so her movements would be unheard on the hardwood floor of the vestibule. Her children and husband would be asleep at this hour.

It was moments before 2:00 AM on Monday morning. Pattie Lou Combs was returning from Phoenix, Arizona where she attended a short 4-day business meeting. She softly lowered her baggage to the floor, re-locked the entry door, picked up her luggage and tiptoed into the master bedroom. She turned on no lights. There were enough stars and moonlight coming through the bedroom window to see her way into the walk-in closet.

Pattie was jet-lagged, sleepy, tired. She quickly removed her bra and half-slip, slipped into bed by her husband. She assumed he was asleep.

A bedside light came on, and Pattie turned to see her husband sitting up against the headboard. They both began to talk at once...he stopped and allowed Pattie to talk: "I'm sorry I woke you, Bradley. I was trying to be quiet."

"You didn't wake me. I've been awake. I need to talk to you, Pattie."

"About, what? Can't it wait until morning? I'm tired and jet-lagged."

"No, I need to talk to you now. I can't let it go any longer...I want a divorce. I can't live the way we're living."

"For God's sake, Bradley. You hit me with this as soon as I get home. I'm tired, and I'm not talking to you about a divorce tonight."

Pattie turned in bed.

"No, dammit, Pattie. We're talking now. You can be tired all you want after we've had this conversation. I want a divorce. I don't love you anymore, and I'm seeing someone else..."

Pattie sat up in bed, started to get up, sat back down on the side of the bed.

“My God, Bradley, why are you putting this on me at this hour in the morning. I can’t handle this, and I won’t give you a divorce. When the hell did you decide all of this. Have you been seeing this person for some time?”

“Yes, and she understands me. She gets me. You don’t even make any effort to get me. You’re always berating me and threatening me. I don’t intend to take it any longer, Pattie. You treat me like a puppy dog. Do this, do that. No more. I’ve had it.”

“You’ve had it. You’ve had it. Why, you weak-kneed excuse for a man. How can you start this crap with me when I’m just getting home? You bastard.”

“A bastard, am I? Hell, for all I know you’ve been sleeping around with your share of men. You play ‘good Mommy’, but I’m guessing you have some men on the string. Look, I’m very serious about this. I want a divorce, and, later this morning I’m out of here.”

“You loathsome SOB, you’ve got two darling little girls down that hall who love you, and you’re talking about leaving them. Well, if you go, you won’t ever see them again and you can take that to your new girlfriend or your boyfriend if that’s the case.”

“Oh, you know about him, do you? Well, he’s better in bed than you...”

“You miserable bastard.”

The shouting was now louder.

Pattie stood, knocked over a bedside table lamp, and it banged into the wall. “My God, how could I make the awful mistake of falling in love with you? You’re a monster, not a man, you pitiful vulgarity. I hate you. I hate you. You will never see my girls. Get out. Get out, now.”

Her words were loud, her anger from a place within her she would never be able to explain or wish to explain to anyone, including

herself. In the middle of her sudden hatred for this man she saw a part of herself she did not know or understand.

She stood transfixed by the bed, her anger invading all parts of her already frenzied body, her eyes blazing, lips trembling, words wanting to flow but unable to form and articulate them.

Pattie Lou's words infuriated Bradley. He rose in a rush from the bed, picked up his pillow and went for her, swinging with his free fist, knocking her back onto the bed, screaming, trying to fight back. He found purchase, straddled her, shoved the pillow down roughly, covered her face, and lifted his body to a rigid push-up pose, her face bearing all his weight from the pillow.

Pattie Lou fought, managed to connect a fist to his face, but, in the end, her body sagged and fell back onto her own pillow, her eyes still open in a terrified stare.

Bradley Combs rose from the disarranged bed, quickly checked Pattie's pulse. His breath was rapidly labored as he found a spot on her neck with his thumb.

There was no pulse.

She was dead.

He quietly closed the bedroom door and smiled with a sarcastic acknowledgement that his quietness now could not alter his previous noisy activities. He checked the bedside clock. It was 2:35 AM. His mind raced. He had to get rid of the body.

A thought came. Yes, a perfect place came to mind. Bradley did not have much time - he needed to be at work by 5:25 AM.

Then, he heard the soft sound of the master bedroom door opening. As he quickly turned toward the door, his mind dipped in a new unsettling awareness.

Linnie, the oldest daughter, tearful with wide red and puffy eyes, asked, "Daddy, what are you doing to Mommy?"