

AUTHOR OF BENEATH DEVIL'S BRIDGE

LORETH ANNE

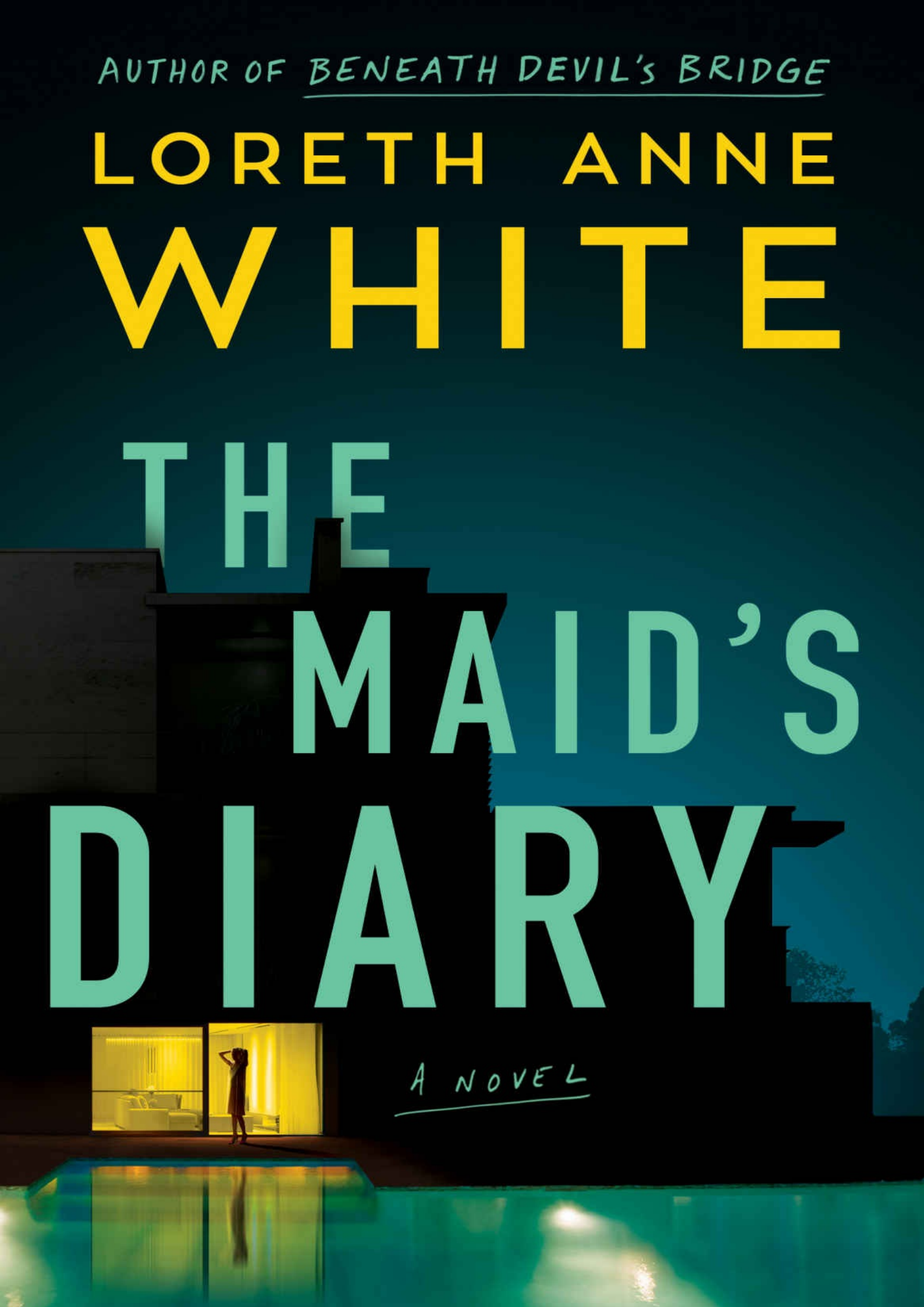
WHITE

THE

MAID'S

DIARY

A NOVEL



## PRAISE FOR *THE PATIENT'S SECRET*

“[An] exceptional psychological thriller . . . White does a superb job keeping the reader guessing as she peels back the layers of a seemingly perfect family to reveal the shocking truth. Suspense fans will want to see more from this talented author.”

—*Publishers Weekly* (starred review)

“*The Patient's Secret* is an intensely moving reading experience . . . Loreth Anne White is a writer at the top of her game, and it's never been more evident than with this piece of work.”

—*Mystery & Suspense Magazine*

## PRAISE FOR *BENEATH DEVIL'S BRIDGE*

“The suspenseful, multilayered plot is matched by fully realized characters. White consistently entertains.”

—*Publishers Weekly*

“If I'm lucky, maybe once in a blue moon, I read a book that leaves my mind reeling, heart aching, and soul searching. One that haunts me long after *The End*. *Beneath Devil's Bridge* is one of those books.”

—*Mystery & Suspense Magazine*

## PRAISE FOR *IN THE DEEP*

“Convincing character development and a denouement worthy of Agatha Christie make this a winner. White has outdone herself.”

—*Publishers Weekly* (starred review)

“This page-turner is tightly written with a moody sense of place in the small coastal community, but it is the numerous twists that will keep readers thoroughly absorbed. A satisfyingly creepy psychological thriller.”

—*Kirkus Reviews*

## PRAISE FOR *IN THE DARK*

“White (*The Dark Bones*) employs kaleidoscopic perspectives in this tense modern adaptation of Agatha Christie’s *And Then There Were None*. White’s structural sleight of hand as she shifts between narrators and timelines keeps the suspense high . . . Christie fans will find this taut, clever thriller to be a worthy homage to the original.”

—*Publishers Weekly*

“White excels at the chilling romantic thriller.”

—The Amazon Book Review

“*In the Dark* is a brilliantly constructed Swiss watch of a thriller, containing both a chilling locked-room mystery reminiscent of Agatha Christie and *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* and a detective story that would make Harry Bosch proud. Do yourself a favor and find some uninterrupted reading time, because you won’t want to put this book down.”

—Jason Pinter, bestselling author of the Henry Parker series

## PRAISE FOR LORETH ANNE WHITE

“A masterfully written, gritty, suspenseful thriller with a tough, resourceful protagonist that hooked me and kept me guessing until the very end. Think C. J. Box and Craig Johnson. Loreth Anne White’s *The Dark Bones* is that good.”

—Robert Dugoni, *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Eighth Sister*

“Secrets, lies, and betrayal converge in this heart-pounding thriller that features a love story as fascinating as the mystery itself.”

—Iris Johansen, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Smokescreen*

“A riveting, atmospheric suspense novel about the cost of betrayal and the power of redemption, *The Dark Bones* grips the reader from the first page to the pulse-pounding conclusion.”

—Kylie Brant, Amazon Charts bestselling author of *Pretty Girls Dancing*

“Loreth Anne White has set the gold standard for the genre.”

—Debra Webb, *USA Today* bestselling author

“Loreth Anne White has a talent for setting and mood. *The Dark Bones* hooked me from the start. A chilling and emotional read.”

—T.R. Ragan, author of *Her Last Day*

“A must-read, *A Dark Lure* is gritty, dark romantic suspense at its best. A damaged yet resilient heroine, a deeply conflicted cop, and a truly terrifying villain collide in a stunning conclusion that will leave you breathless.”

—Melinda Leigh, *Wall Street Journal* and Amazon Charts bestselling author

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# THE MAID'S DIARY

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WHITE

*The Patient's Secret*  
*Beneath Devil's Bridge*  
*In the Deep*  
*In the Dark*  
*The Dark Bones*  
*In the Barren Ground*  
*In the Waning Light*  
*A Dark Lure*  
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LORETH ANNE  
**WHITE**

**THE  
MAID'S  
DIARY**

A NOVEL

 Montlake

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*For Marlin and Syd:  
Thank you for putting up with me and Hudson during a  
tumultuous wildfire summer. Love you both.*

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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# HOW IT ENDS

Slowly, she slides between sleep and consciousness. A shard of cognition slices through her—no, not sleep. Not in her bed. Not safe. Panic stirs. Where is she? She tries to swallow, but her mouth is dry. There’s an unfamiliar taste at the back of her throat. A sharper jolt of awareness cracks through her. Blood—it’s the taste of blood. Her breathing quickens. She tries to move her head but can’t. A rough, wet fabric covers her face. She’s trapped, arms strapped tightly to her sides. She becomes aware of pain. Overwhelming pain. In her shoulders. Ribs. Belly. Between her thighs. The pain pounds inside her skull. Adrenaline surges into her veins and her eyes flare open. But she can’t see. Panic licks through her brain. She opens her mouth to scream, but it comes out muffled.

What is this? Where am I?

Focus, focus. Panic kills. You have to think. Try to remember.

But her brain is foggy. She strains for a thread of clarity, struggles to focus on sensations. Cold—her feet are very cold. She wiggles her toes. She feels air. Bare feet? No, just the one. She’s got a shoe on the other. She’s injured. Badly, she thinks. A thick memory seeps into her sluggish brain—fighting people off, being held down. Violently attacked—she has a sense of that, of being overwhelmed, rendered powerless. Then wounded. Now she’s wrapped in something and she’s in motion. Bumping. She can feel vibrations. Is that the noise of an engine? A car? Yes, she’s in a vehicle of some sort. She becomes aware of voices. In the front seat. She’s lying on the back seat. The voices . . . they sound urgent—arguing. Underlying the voices is soft music. A car radio. She’s definitely in a car . . . they’re taking her somewhere.

She hears words. “Dump . . . her fault . . . asked for it. Can’t blame \_\_\_”

She slides into the blackness again. This time it’s complete.

# THE SILENT WITNESSES

*October 31, 2019. Thursday.*

It's 11:57 p.m. Halloween night. Dark. A dense fog creeps along the water, and a steady drizzle falls as a silver Mercedes-Maybach with two occupants turns onto a muddy track that leads into an abandoned grain-storage site. Rain glints as the headlights pan over the bases of the old silos. The sedan crosses a railway track and bounces along a potholed road that parallels the edge of the ocean inlet. The Mercedes comes to a stop in deep shadows beneath a bridge that arcs over the inlet, linking the North Shore to the city of Vancouver. The headlights go out. Everything is now black except the glow of the fog-shrouded city across the water.

The occupants feel safe here, hidden, cocooned in the buttery leather and warmth of the luxury sedan. Overhead the bridge traffic is a soft roar, punctuated by rhythmic clunks as vehicles traverse the metal joints.

The man and woman don't waste time marveling at how the incoming tide swirls like ink past the old silo dockyard. Their lust has reached fever pitch. It started this morning—this little game of theirs—over a breakfast meeting, her stockinged calf pressing against his pant leg beneath a table as they calmly discussed legal strategy with city officials. Desire blossomed through subsequent high-level discussions around a lawsuit, followed by lunch. It peaked with a stolen kiss behind the door in the men's washroom. Both knew it would end like this—frenzied sex in her car parked in some louche location. It's the anticipation the couple is addicted to. The danger. The risk. They are both married to other people. He's a member of the provincial legislative assembly. She is a top city lawyer. They both have children.

They always pick a place like this. Something industrial. Dank. Deserted. Tagged with graffiti, littered with urban detritus. Sordid yet delicious in a disreputable way. It's their quirk—fornicating against backdrops of squalor. Juxtaposing their glamour and brains and wealth and privilege against these gritty urban canvases—it piques their desire. Makes

them feel powerful. It layers their affair with a noir-film graininess that feeds their carnal pleasure.

She kicks off her Saint Laurent pumps while yanking at his red tie, fumbling with his zipper. He pops open the pearly buttons on her silk blouse, bunching up her skirt, ripping her expensive pantyhose in his hunger. She scrambles over the console, straddles him. As she sinks down onto him, he closes his eyes and moans with pleasure. But she suddenly goes still. She sees two sets of headlights appearing in the mist. The beams punch twin tunnels into the fog—one vehicle behind the other. The cars turn in front of the abandoned silos and head toward the rail tracks.

“Someone’s coming,” she whispers.

He doesn’t seem to register. Eyes still closed, he groans and tilts up his pelvis, trying to guide her hips into motion against his groin. But she clamps her hand over his, holding him still. Her heart thumps. “It’s two cars,” she says. “Coming this way.”

He opens his eyes, turns his head, then sits sharply upright. He scrubs a hole with the back of his fist in the steamed-up window. They peer through it in silence as the headlights cross the tracks and approach, paralleling the water.

“Shit,” he says quietly. “This is private land. It’s cordoned off for construction. No one should be here. Especially at this hour.”

“Maybe it’s kids out for some Halloween nonsense, or a drug deal,” she whispers.

The cars come closer. The lead vehicle is smaller than the one following it, but the fog, rain, and darkness make it difficult to discern the cars’ exact colors or models. And both vehicles are also backlit—silhouetted by the eerie glow emanating from the hidden city across the water. The smaller vehicle could be yellow, or cream, the woman thinks. A hatchback. The larger car is a sedan. Maybe dark gray or blue. The two sets of headlights briefly pan the inky water as the vehicles follow a bend in the track. Seawater shimmers in the light like beaten metal.

“They’re coming right at us,” the woman says.

“There’s nowhere to go, no alternate exit,” he says. “We’re sitting ducks.”

The cars come even closer.

“What in the hell?” The woman quickly relocates to the driver’s seat and struggles to tug up her torn pantyhose and pull on her pumps. He yanks up his zipper.

“Wait, wait—they’re stopping,” he says.

The couple go still. In hidden silence they watch as the driver’s-side



door of the hatchback swings open and a tall figure climbs out. They see a logo on the side of the door. Another figure exits the larger sedan. Shorter. Stouter. Both drivers are dressed in black gear that shines in the rain. One wears a hat. The other a hood. The drivers leave the headlights on and the engines of both cars running. Exhaust fumes puff white clouds into the darkness.

Mist thickens and swirls around the two drivers as they open the rear door of the sedan. They struggle to tug something large and heavy out of the back seat. It appears to be a big roll of carpet. It drops to the ground with obvious weight.

“What’re they doing?” the woman asks.

“They’ve got something rolled up in that rug,” the man says. “Something heavy.”

Neither wants to admit what they think it might be.

The two drivers heft and drag their cargo toward the water. At the edge of the abandoned dock, using feet and hands, they push and roll it over the edge. The object disappears. A second later it comes back into sight—a flash of white swirling toward the bridge in the tidal current. It spins in the water, then begins to sink. A moment later it’s gone.

The woman swallows.

The interior of the Mercedes turns ice cold.

The man can’t breathe.

Both are terrified by what they’ve witnessed. The chill of it crawls deep into their bones. The tall driver hurries back to the hatchback. He leans into the driver’s side and fiddles with something beneath the steering wheel. The two drivers watch as the hatchback moves toward the water, as if of its own volition.

“Oh my God, they’ve jammed down the accelerator! We need to get out of here.” The woman reaches for the ignition.

“Stop.” The man clamps his hand over her forearm. “Do not move a single muscle until they’re gone. They could kill us for what we’ve just seen.”

They stare in mounting horror as the hatchback seems to hesitate, then tilts over the edge of the dock. As it plunges over, it catches refracted light from the bridge traffic. It’s a yellow car, the woman thinks. A Subaru Crosstrek like the one she and her husband bought their son for his eighteenth birthday. The logo on the door seems familiar. She’s seen it before but can’t think where. The water closes over the car, leaving a luminous froth of foam that travels with the current toward the bridge. It disappears. There’s nothing left—no indication that anything went off the

dock. Just black water muscling with the tide.

The two drivers hasten to the waiting sedan. The tall one climbs into the driver's side, the shorter one into the passenger side. The doors slam shut. The sedan lurches at speed along the muddy track. Brake lights flare, and it crosses the tracks, then turns and trundles across the deserted silo yard. It vanishes into fog.

Neither of the Mercedes's occupants speaks. Tension hangs thick between them. They should call 911.

Both know they won't.

Neither will breathe a word of this to a single solitary soul, because if anyone learns they were here, together, at this abandoned place beneath the bridge in the dark and very early hours of what is now Friday morning, they will lose everything.

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# THE MAID'S DIARY

Just start, my therapist said. Put words down, even if it's stream of consciousness, even if it's only to record something very ordinary you did in your day. If you find it difficult, try noting something that worries you. Just one thing. Or pick a thing that makes you happy. Or enraged. Or something that terrifies you. Write things you'll never let anyone read. Then for every insight, ask yourself why. Why do you think this? What are the stakes of losing that illusion? Ask why, write why, until you want to scream. Until you cannot stare at the words any longer, or until you drop through a trapdoor into something new. Then step away. Be physical. Walk, run, hike, swim, dance. Keep doing that until you're ready to return to the page. The key is just to start. Keep it simple. And I promise you, it will begin to flow.

*So here I am, Dear Diary—my Dear Therapist-by-proxy—just putting it down. Starting simple. My name is Kit. Kit Darling. I'm thirty-four. Single. Vegan. Love animals. Feed birds.*

*I'm a maid.*

*My passion is amateur theater.*

*My superpower is being invisible.*

*Yes, you read that right. I have been bestowed with the gift of invisibility. I move through people's houses unseen—a ghost—quietly dusting off the daily debris of their lives, restoring order to their outwardly “perfect” little microcosms. I wash and tidy and fold and sift through the privacy of elitist enclaves, touching, sniffing, envying, and at times trying on belongings. And here's a thing I've learned: Perfection is deception. An illusion. It's a carefully curated but false narrative. The golden family you think you know from the luxury home down the street—they're not who you believe they are. They have faults,*

secrets. Sometimes dark and terrible ones. Oddly, as a house cleaner, a processor of garbage and dirt, I am entrusted with the secrets inside these houses. Perhaps it's because I'm seen as irrelevant. Benign. Not worthy of deeper consideration. Just the hired help.

So I go about my dusting and vacuuming, and I snoop. That's the other thing: I have a snooping problem.

I mean, we all get a dopamine-adrenaline kick when we glimpse something that wasn't meant for us to see, right? Don't pretend you're above it. We scroll through social media, hunting for the train wrecks happening in real time, and we cannot look away. We click on those links that promise to reveal a Hollywood star in a compromising bikini shot, or without makeup, or being a bad mommy in Starbucks. In the supermarket checkout line, we reach for the tabloid that screams with promises of insider tidbits about a British prince's affair. I just take it up a level. It keeps my days exciting.

When I arrive at a job, I already have my snooping strategy in place. I set a timer, and I do my cleaning fast enough that I always have a spare chunk of time to go through a dresser, a closet, a box in an attic, or a certain room.

And I follow the little clues. I find secrets that the occupants of a house try desperately to hide even from one another: the wife from her husband, the father from his daughter, a son from his mother. I see the little blue pills. A syringe. Breath mints and cigarette butts hidden in a cracked pot in a garden shed. A teen's tequila bottle stashed at the back of an underwear drawer. A husband's porn links saved in his computer. A wife's carefully hidden note from a not-so-long-ago lover, or a letter from a parole board. A pregnancy test secreted among trash that has been set aside for me to take out.

I see these people.

I know the occupants of these houses.

But they don't see me.

They don't know me.

Should I bump into one of them on a nearby sidewalk, or in the aisles of a grocery store, they won't recognize the