

THE WIDOW'S HUSBAND'S SECRET

LIE

A
SATIRICAL
NOVELLA



#1 *NEW YORK TIMES* BESTSELLING AUTHOR

FREIDA
McFADDEN

**THE WIDOW'S HUSBAND'S
SECRET LIE**

A SATIRICAL NOVELLA

FREIDA MCFADDEN

CONTENTS

[Prologue](#)

[Chapter 1](#)

[Chapter 2](#)

[Chapter 3](#)

[Chapter 4](#)

[Chapter 5](#)

[Chapter 6](#)

[Chapter 7](#)

[Chapter 8](#)

[Chapter 9](#)

[Chapter 10](#)

[Chapter 11](#)

[Chapter 12](#)

[Chapter 13](#)

[Chapter 14](#)

[Chapter 15](#)

[Chapter 16](#)

[Chapter 17](#)

[Chapter 18](#)

[Chapter 19](#)

[Chapter 20](#)

[Chapter 21](#)

[Chapter 22](#)

[Chapter 23](#)

[Chapter 24](#)

[Chapter 25](#)

[Chapter 26](#)

[Chapter 27](#)

[Chapter 28](#)

[Epilogue](#)

[Acknowledgments](#)

[Afterword](#)

[Bad Date SOS!!!](#)

[Also by Freida McFadden](#)

[About the Author](#)

For hiunuihikhjjkj;'/Ljk////////////////////////////////ffgf

(Sorry, my cat walked across my keyboard so many times, I finally decided to let her write the dedication)

PROLOGUE

YOU THINK YOU KNOW WHO THE KILLER IS.

It's obvious, you say. You knew it from the first chapter. The first paragraph. The first sentence. The first *letter*.

But you are wrong. There is nothing obvious about the identity of this antagonist. I have used red herring after red herring, woven in false identities and unreliable narrators, and fabricated evidence. At least three people who you thought were dead are actually alive.

There is no possible way you could know the truth. There's no way you could ever guess that the killer is actually Steve.

Wait. Oh, crap.

Ugh. Well, nobody reads the prologue anyway.

1

I AM BROWSING SHAMPOOS AT THE DRUGSTORE WHEN I BECOME AWARE THAT I am being followed.

I've never been followed before. Why would I? I'm not a *spy*. Yet I immediately recognize that's what's happening. It's like when you walk into a room and instinctively know that everyone was just talking about you. (That happens to me a lot.)

So that's how I know, without ever having been followed before, that there is somebody behind me, watching me. Somebody who saw me enter this drugstore and has been tracking my every move.

Before I recognized that someone was following me, I was attempting to decide which shampoo to buy. The last couple of weeks have been incredibly hard on me, and it's a comfort to get back to a mundane activity like shopping. It's my first step in returning to normal life.

My usual brand is made from tea tree oil, smells like mint, and is supposed to deep clean and refresh my scalp. But every time I shop for shampoo, I start to doubt myself. Do I need one that is more hydrating? Less hydrating? Is my hair oily or dry? How have I gotten through thirty-four years of life without knowing this basic fact about my hair?

Even without somebody watching me, it's overwhelming.

I pick up a bottle of something called coconut milk shampoo. It advertises having coconut oil and egg-white protein. I can see why I might need egg-white protein in my diet, but do I need it in my hair? I examine

the bottle, studying the shockingly long list of ingredients, which includes many items that have over ten syllables, none of which are coconut or egg related.

And then, in the middle of *dodecenylsuccinate*, I whip my head around. Five seconds ago, I felt a pair of eyes boring into me. I would have bet my life on it. And now I am utterly alone in the shampoo aisle. I look left and right, but there's nobody here. Nobody is watching me.

I must be imagining it. Apparently, my life has reached a point where I am hallucinating people following me.

Shopping for shampoo should not be a stressful endeavor. I was doing this exact activity when I met Grant for the first time. I was standing in the shampoo aisle, just like today, trying to figure out if my hair needed more or less surfactant, and Grant was a few feet away, looking at the soap on the other side of the aisle.

I noticed him, of course. It was hard to ignore a man like Grant Lockwood. But the wild part was that he noticed me too.

He smiled at me with a row of startlingly perfect teeth and said, "Whatever you are using in your hair right now, you should buy it again, because it is perfect."

Barely a year later, we were married.

I suppose it's possible that this bit of nostalgia is what brought me here in the first place. That and the fact that my shampoo bottle is nearly empty. I tried turning it upside down and shaking it as hard as I could, but I could only squeeze out a dime-sized amount of liquid.

I replace the coconut oil shampoo on the shelf and pick up my tried-and-true tea tree oil. Above all, I'm a creature of habit. Also, I want to pay for my shampoo and get the hell out of here.

I clutch the brown bottle as I walk in the direction of the cashiers. And with each step, I still can't shake that sensation of being watched. Maybe this is all in my head—a hallucination. But it *feels* like somebody is there.

I stop. Turn around again.

Still nobody.

You're losing it, Alice. Now you think you're being followed, of all things. What next?

When I'm halfway to the cash registers, I pass a display of sunglasses. In the middle of October, it's hardly sunglasses weather anymore, but I stop there anyway. The array of sunglasses is only slightly less overwhelming

than the number of shampoos. I pick up a pair of dark ones that are polarized. I have no idea what that means, but it must be important because the tag on the glasses says it in big block letters.

I make a motion like I'm about to put on the pair of sunglasses, but instead, I peer into the tiny mirror meant for modeling the glasses on my face. I can clearly see my flaming-red hair, although today it looks limp and lifeless. People often compliment me on my vivid sea-green eyes, but now they are puffy, and the rims are lined with pink. I look tired.

But that's not all I see. In the mirror, I can make out a man standing behind me. Watching me. He's a few years older than me, roughly late thirties. He has dark-blond hair that is straight and laced with flecks of gold from the sun. Chiseled features. A square jaw. Determined-looking blue eyes.

I suck in a breath. This man looks *exactly* like Grant.

I watch him for as long as I dare in the reflection, and then I turn. But as expected, he has vanished, like he never existed in the first place.

I push back a wave of nausea. The resemblance between that man and Grant was uncanny. Of course, it was hard to get a good look in that sliver of a mirror, and the man was at least twenty feet away from me. It's entirely possible that I simply imagined the similarities in appearance. In fact, that is by far the best explanation.

I return the polarized sunglasses to the display. I continue marching down the aisle until I reach the cash registers and join a line that is much longer than it ought to be at two in the afternoon—there are a few people ahead of me, and they seem to be taking forever. One woman is paying with a check. A check? Really? Who pays with a check in this century? She may as well be trading with gold trinkets.

And all the while, I have a creepy-crawly sensation in the back of my neck. I turn around one last time, searching for the man who looks like Grant. I look past the counter where you can print your photos and the snack-food aisle and the one with all the feminine hygiene products. But there's nobody there who looks like my husband.

I need to calm down. Whatever I saw in the mirror of that sunglasses display must have been my imagination. Or an optical illusion. But the important thing I need to remember is that it was *not Grant*. It was definitely not my husband standing in the middle of the drugstore and

watching me while I chose shampoo and browsed sunglasses. It couldn't have been.

Because my husband has been dead for two weeks.

I HAVE THE MOST BEAUTIFUL HOME.

It's an old house with the first two floors fully renovated, although the attic is yet untouched. Grant owned it for many years before I moved in, and I always wondered why he never bothered to update the topmost floor of the house, but I didn't probe too deeply. The house is made of brown bricks with a white trim and a large chimney rising majestically from the roof. The home boasts five bedrooms that we fantasized about filling with children after reading in a magazine that this Long Island neighborhood had some of the best schools in the state.

These days, it just seems empty.

When I pull into the driveway and park just outside our two-car garage, I find a woman standing on my front porch, wearing yoga pants and a hoodie, her brown hair in a messy bun, clutching a large rectangular dish. It's Poppy, my next-door neighbor and closest friend, and she has what I presume is a casserole.

I don't want another casserole. However, ever since Grant died, it seems that people have decided that casseroles are *all* I want. I have received more of them than flowers, despite the fact that casseroles are more of a family thing, and there's just one of me. My refrigerator is only one rectangular pan away from being a solid mass of noodles and cream of mushroom soup.

I kill the engine and climb out of my Lexus, clutching the brown paper bag containing my tea tree oil shampoo. Poppy brightens when she sees me,

balancing the dish on one hand so she can wave to me. For a moment, I hope that the dish will fall, spilling egg noodles and broccoli everywhere.

“Alice!” she calls out. “I brought you dinner!”

I try to smile, although I suspect the smile doesn’t touch my eyes or even my nose. “That’s very thoughtful.”

“Just pop this in the oven for thirty minutes at 350,” she chirps, even though I am well aware of how to heat up a casserole, thank you very much.

I unlock the door to the house. For a split second, I get that sensation, again, that there is somebody watching me. Poppy is smiling eagerly as she waits for me to unlock the door, but when she notices my expression, her smile falters.

“Are you okay, Alice?” she asks.

People keep asking me that. How could I be okay? My husband is dead. He was one month shy of thirty-eight years old, and he died in a fiery car wreck. How exactly am I supposed to be okay?

Yet I can’t say all that. What they are really asking is if I am going to suddenly dissolve into a blubbering mess, ripping my hair out with my fists, and then run up to the roof and throw myself off. That is the actual question.

“I’m okay,” I say.

I finally manage to get the door open, and Poppy tags along after me with her casserole. “Are you hungry?” she asks. “I can heat it up for you now.”

It wouldn’t do to tell her that I hate casseroles with every fiber of my being. Not after she’s made me five of them.

“No, thanks.” I wrench open the coat closet by the front door—one of the few closets in the house that does not allow you to walk inside. I look up at the LED lights mounted on the ceiling of the closet, and I swear softly under my breath. *Useless*. “I’m not really hungry.”

“I’ll make you some tea, then,” Poppy says.

Before I can protest that I don’t actually like tea either (I find it just barely tolerable if you put a little milk in it), Poppy is inside my kitchen. She fills a pot with warm water and sets it on the stove to boil. She searches in a cupboard over the sink until she locates a box of herbal tea. It must have belonged to Grant.

While Poppy is brewing the tea, I wander into the living room. There’s very little in this room that doesn’t remind me of Grant. The television set is

almost comically large, because he said that we have the money and should treat ourselves. There's the antique coffee table that he saw me admiring in the store and insisted on buying in spite of the outrageous price tag. Even the Italian leather sofa still has a dent in it from where he always used to sit.

The most memories, however, are reflected in the frames sitting on the mantel over the fireplace. I step across our Oriental rug to get a closer look at the photographs that catalog our relationship from beginning to end. There is one of the two of us at a fancy seafood restaurant, celebrating the anniversary of our first date. Our wedding photo: me wearing a white lacy gown, with my vivid crimson hair pulled up into a French twist, little tendrils falling around the side of my face, and Grant looking devastatingly handsome in a tuxedo. Another photo of our honeymoon in Cancun, looking happy and tan on the beach.

"You must be missing him a lot."

Poppy's voice comes from behind me, and I nearly jump out of my skin. I turn around to find her holding out a steaming mug of tea. I take it so as not to be rude, and now I have to stand here, holding this gross tea, pretending to drink it.

You would think that if Poppy is my closest friend, she would know I don't enjoy drinking tea. There is, in fact, quite a lot she doesn't know about me.

"Drink up while it's hot," she tells me.

Obligingly, I take a sip of the tea. Not surprisingly, it's terrible. Because it's tea.

Poppy sits beside me and idly picks up the paperback book I've got lying on the coffee table. She reads the description and flips through the pages. "*The Boyfriend...* Is this any good?"

"Oh, yes—I love it. But I'm on page two, and I'm pretty sure I already know what the twist is going to be." I take another tentative sip of tea. "Have you ever heard of the author, Freida McFadden?"

"Nope."

"She writes psychological thrillers. The kind with short chapters and lots of twists that are shocking but also kind of completely out of nowhere."

"Still nope." She hesitates. "Oh, wait. Did she write *Fifty Shades of Grey*?"

"Uh, no."

"*Harry Potter*?"

“No.”

“Then no, never heard of her. What else did she write?”

“*The Housemaid.*”

“Housemaid? Is she British?” Poppy asks.

“Oh, I’m not sure. Yes, probably.”

Poppy tosses the paperback back on the table. I pretend to take another sip of tea while she gets up to study the photos on my mantel. She scrutinizes them one by one, a frown spreading across her lips. “You guys were so happy together. This must be so hard for you.”

You have no idea, Poppy, I want to tell her. It’s so hard that I’m seeing Grant while I’m buying shampoo.

“Yes,” I say instead.

“Sometimes I think we all just get a certain amount of happiness,” she muses. “And you and Grant had so much of it during your time together. Maybe you simply... used it all up.”

Great theory, Poppy. I force a smile. “I was certainly blessed.”

“And it might not have seemed like it at the time,” she says, “but it ended up being a good thing that you never got pregnant, even though I know you and Grant had been hoping for it.”

I close my eyes for a moment, thinking of all those extra bedrooms upstairs. Grant had a twinkle in his eyes when we talked about turning one of them into a nursery, but then every month, I would get my period, and there would be that unspoken disappointment.

I press the palm of my hand against my abdomen.

“I just want you to know,” Poppy says, “that you’re my best friend, and whatever you need, I am here for you.”

But I’m not listening to Poppy. I’m looking over her shoulder, at the window that overlooks the side of our house and the narrow and deserted path that runs between my house and Poppy’s. The two houses are divided by a picket fence that surrounds my entire property.

For a split second, I could swear there is a face staring at me through that window.

AFTER POPPY GOES HOME, I CLIMB THE SPIRALING STAIRCASE, WHICH creaks and groans with each step, until I reach the second floor.

I never go higher than that—I haven't ventured even once up to the attic, which contains a single room that locks from the outside. Grant says the room is used as storage for items that belonged to his late wife, Rebertha, who lived here before me and died in a tragic accident long before we met. I don't even have the key.

As I pad through the hallway, a sound comes from up above. During the time we have lived in this house, I have often heard mysterious noises—thumps and moans and once something that sounded very much like a scream but Grant insisted was the wind. He explained that these are normal “house sounds,” and I just don't understand because I've never lived in an old house before.

I stop short as the ceiling trembles with another thump from up above. The noise sounded very much like footsteps. Is somebody up there? Is that possible?

No, it couldn't be.

I push away thoughts of the mysterious attic room which I was never allowed to enter and continue to the master bedroom. Even though Grant is gone, I still sleep on the right side of the bed. I can't seem to break that habit even now that I have a whole king-sized bed to stretch out on. Every night since his death, I have jolted awake several times, expecting to see

him sleeping soundly on the mattress beside me. But his side of the bed is always empty.

The bed still smells like him. The sheets have been changed twice since his death, yet the scent of him lingers. The whole room smells like his sandalwood cologne.

I wish I had something in my life to take my mind off the death of my husband. I gave up my job as a real estate agent soon after Grant and I married. At first, I was reluctant to give it up. But he talked me into it.

“My job is my life,” I remember telling him.

“But you don’t need a job,” he insisted. “I have more than enough money to take care of the two of us for several lifetimes. My job is to make you happy, and if I’m doing it right, you should never have to work.”

And when he looked into my eyes, I believed he meant it. He tried so hard to make me happy. He said he loved the way my eyes lit up when he gave me presents, which was something he did with great frequency. He loved to spoil me.

Giving up my job was something I came to regret. After a while, all the days started to feel the same. I was bored. There was more to life than watching television and shopping and book club meetings. But I tried to be the perfect little wife, hoping to please him.

In the middle of the afternoon, I got the phone call. It was the police, telling me about a terrible car accident on the Long Island Expressway. There was only one victim—my husband—and they needed me to identify his body. I drove down to the morgue as fast as I could, narrowly avoiding an accident myself. In spite of how mangled he was, it took me five seconds to positively identify my husband. I knew that face very well.

“I’m so sorry,” the police officer told me as I wiped away the single tear that was rolling down my cheek.

This must have been how Grant felt when Rebertha died in that awful accident at sea.

I try to block out the memory of that fateful day as I open the walk-in closet of the bedroom. The left half is stuffed with Grant’s suits for work. I run my fingers along the expensive fabric of one of the dark ones. I never thought there was much difference between a cheap and an expensive suit, but Grant taught me otherwise. He always loved to look his best.

And then there’s my side of the closet on the right. Grant insisted I get rid of all the outfits from the before time—before Grant came into my life,

when everything I wore was purchased on sale from the discount rack. He bought me all new clothes with labels like Givenchy and Prada and Gucci.

And stuffed at the far end of the row of dresses is the one dress I will never forget. It taunts me, innocently dangling from that hanger. I run my fingers along the smooth fabric, my heart pounding all the way up in my throat.

No. I will not think about that dress anymore. That time in my life is officially over.

I flick off the lights in the closet. Same as downstairs in the hall closet, the lights overhead are LEDs. Grant never understood why I insisted on installing them. If he'd known the reason, he never would have agreed.

I close my eyes, remembering the reflection of Grant's face in the mirror of the sunglasses display. At the moment, it seemed so incredibly real. But now that I'm looking back on it, how could it have been? Grant is *dead*. I identified his body at the morgue. I attended his funeral, where they lowered his coffin into the ground and buried him six feet under. The only way I could have seen him is if he were a ghost, and I would be so mad if that happened, because it would seriously be a super-cheap twist.

I must have imagined it. After all the trauma I have been through, it's not entirely surprising that I would imagine I'm seeing Grant's face, even when he's clearly not really there.

The herbal tea that I forced myself to drink is sloshing around in my bladder. My next stop is the master bathroom, with its heated floors and toilet seat. Heated floors and toilet seats are some of the things I never knew I needed in my life until I had them. If heaven exists, I guarantee every bathroom has heated toilet seats and toasty-warm floors. Although I can't be sure that's where I'm going.

The toilet flushes automatically when I stand up. It's quite a special toilet—I can't emphasize that enough. As I wash my hands in the sink, I catch a glimpse of an object lying in the small wastepaper basket next to the toilet, and my stomach clenches.

One week ago, I pulled that test strip out of its wrapper. I sat on the heated toilet seat and watched the two blue lines appear that would change my life forever.

I'm pregnant.

I WAKE UP THE NEXT MORNING TO THE WHIR OF THE VACUUM CLEANER. I always felt capable of doing my own cleaning, but Grant loved to spoil me, so he insisted on hiring someone to do this job. And I have to admit, it's nice having a person to clean my floors, swap out the sheets on the beds, and wash the dishes.

Since they will want to clean inside the master bedroom, I shower quickly, throw on a sweater and designer jeans, then head downstairs. When I get to the first floor, the smell of eggs and bacon wafts into my nostrils. I reach the dining room just in time to see the plate containing my breakfast being placed on the huge mahogany table large enough to seat twelve.

"Hello, Mrs. Lockwood," a familiar voice says.

I force a smile onto my lips to greet Willie, our houseman. "Hello."

"I have your full breakfast prepared," Willie tells me in an accent that I've never quite been able to identify. "It's nothing too fancy. Just some bacon, sausages, eggs, black pudding, baked beans, tomatoes, mushrooms, toast, fried bread..." He pauses. "And of course, a cup of tea."

"Thank you, Willie," I say. "It smells absolutely delicious."

"I hope you like it, Mrs. Lockwood."

I meet Willie's eyes across the dining table. Willie is in his late twenties, with a shock of jet-black hair, and there's something incredibly alluring about him. I'm not sure exactly what it is. Maybe it's his dark, dark eyes or his broad, muscular shoulders. Maybe it's the fact that he always cleans our

house with his shirt off. It's hard to put my finger on it, but Grant never entirely trusted him.

"Is there anything else I can do for you, Mrs. Lockwood?" he asks me. "Anything at all?"

"No, thank you."

"I'll get back to work, then."

Willie grabs a bottle of lemon-scented spray and strides over to the living room to clean our coffee table. I settle down before my plate of food, making sure I have a view of Willie as he bends over to clean the table.

In the weeks before Grant's death, he urged me to fire Willie and find a new houseman. "There's something off about him," Grant used to say.

He would have trusted him even less if he'd known the truth about our houseman's dark past.

WHILE I'M AT THE GROCERY STORE THAT AFTERNOON, I DISCOVER THERE are almost as many varieties of prenatal vitamins as there are of shampoo. For example, do I buy the one that has eighteen different vitamins and minerals, including folic acid and DHA? Or do I buy the one that specifically mentions choline? Not that I know what choline is, but if they mention it, it's important, right? Or should I just buy the one that is raspberry lemonade flavored, because I'm always a sucker for raspberry lemonade?

Finally, I grab the vitamins that advertise *advanced brain support*. Because whatever else, I would like my baby's brain to have adequate support.

As I toss the bottle of prenatal vitamins into my shopping cart, I press my palm against my abdomen, which is still flat as a board. It's hard to imagine that there is an actual baby growing inside there. I wouldn't believe it, but pregnancy tests don't lie. It wasn't meant to be this way, but the wild part is now that it happened, I love her more than anything.

I have made mistakes in my life, but I swear, I will make it up to you, baby.

I decided to shop at the grocery store this time, because the drugstore apparently triggers hallucinations of my dead husband. Thankfully, I have been at the supermarket for ten minutes, and there have been zero dead husbands during that time.

Of course, I can't *just* buy prenatal vitamins. That would be like holding up a huge flag for everyone to see that says "I am pregnant." I need to buffer my purchase with other items so as not to call attention to the entire reason I came to the grocery store. I toss several other things into the cart, including a loaf of bread, some cheese, another bottle of shampoo, and—just to *really* throw off the cashier—a package of maxi pads.

I push my shopping cart to the checkout line. Unfortunately, I arrived at the supermarket at the worst possible time, because all the lines have at least four or five people in them. The ten-items-or-less register seems the most promising, so I get in line behind a man who has not followed my buffer rule and is simply clutching a box of ribbed condoms in his right hand with a very singular purpose in mind. He keeps checking his watch.

"Alice! Alice Lockwood! Is that you?"

I curse under my breath at the familiar voice. It's Eliza Bradley, who used to work as Grant's secretary. She's pushing a cart containing nothing but cans of gourmet cat food, and she's wearing a puffy coat that is far too warm for the weather we're having.

"Hello," I mumble, hoping that if I don't look at her, she might get the message that I'm not in the mood for chitchat.

But Eliza is not to be deterred. She pushes her cart so close to mine that they are practically kissing and peers up at me. Her face is wrinkled, and her lips nearly vanish into her mouth. "My dear, I didn't get a chance to talk to you at the funeral. I am so terribly sorry."

Of all the people I could have run into today at the supermarket, she is the last one I wanted to see. "Uh-huh" is all I can manage.

"Grant was such a wonderful man," she continues. "He was a great boss. He was so thoughtful. And charming. And *young*. What a terrible shame."

"Mm-hmm."

"I told Grant that Mercedes of his wasn't safe," she says. "American cars are the safest ones on the market. The only ones that I trust, you know? That's why I've driven a Ford for the last forty years."

"Mm-hmm."

"By the way, Alice," Eliza says. "I hate to be that person, but you *do* realize this is the ten items or less line, don't you?"

"Excuse me?"