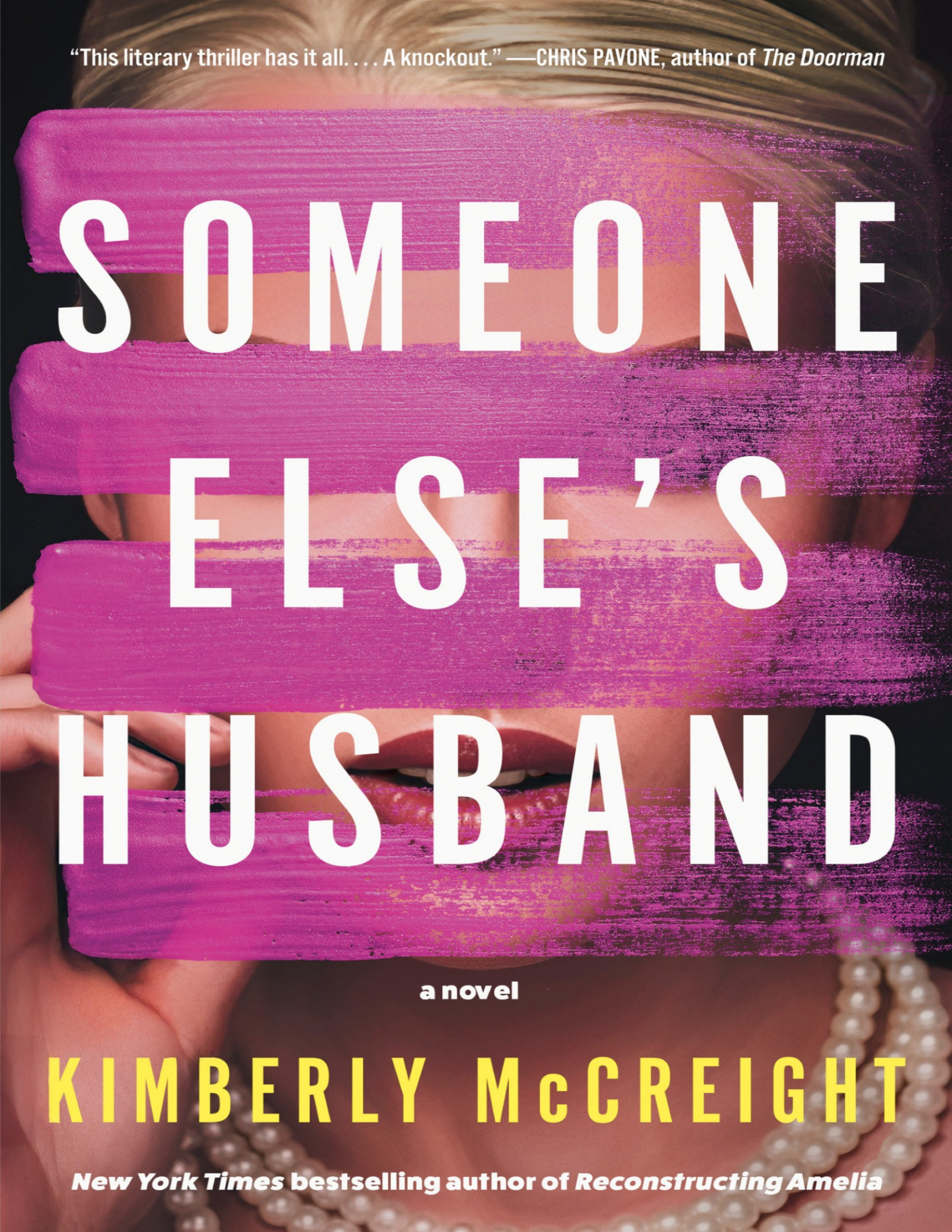


"This literary thriller has it all. . . . A knockout." —CHRIS PAVONE, author of *The Doorman*

A close-up photograph of a woman's face, with her eyes and mouth obscured by thick, horizontal pink brushstrokes. The background is a warm, reddish-pink hue.

SOMEONE ELSE'S HUSBAND

a novel

KIMBERLY McCREIGHT

New York Times bestselling author of *Reconstructing Amelia*

ALSO BY KIMBERLY McCREIGHT

Reconstructing Amelia

Where They Found Her

A Good Marriage

Friends Like These

Like Mother, Like Daughter

SOMEONE
ELSE'S
HUSBAND

• A NOVEL •

KIMBERLY
McCREIGHT



ALFRED A. KNOPF

NEW YORK

2026

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Contents

[Dedication](#)

[Epigraph](#)

[Prologue](#)

[After](#)

[Richard Falk Police Interview](#)

[Before](#)

[Grand Jury Transcript](#)

[After](#)

[\[I don't believe...\]](#)

[Before](#)

[Richard Falk Police Interview](#)

[After](#)

[\[I've left a...\]](#)

[Before](#)

Grand Jury Transcript

After

[Life is all...]

Before

Grand Jury Transcript

After

[You met a...]

Before

Richard Falk Police Interview

After

Grand Jury Transcript

Before

[Today she left...]

After

Richard Falk Police Interview

Before

[Richard Falk Police Interview](#)

[After](#)

[Grand Jury Transcript](#)

[Before](#)

[Grand Jury Transcript](#)

[After](#)

[\[She needs to...\]](#)

[Before](#)

[Richard Falk Police Interview](#)

[After](#)

[\[I followed them...\]](#)

[Before](#)

[Grand Jury Transcript](#)

[After](#)

[Grand Jury Transcript](#)

[Before](#)

Grand Jury Transcript

After

Grand Jury Transcript

Before

After

[I always did...]

Before

Grand Jury Transcript

Epilogue

Acknowledgments

A Note About the Author

For the climbers of mountains, large and small.

May we all someday find what we're looking for.

Hearts are made to be broken.

—OSCAR WILDE

PROLOGUE

Getting away with it.

That's what people call it. Because when you do something terrible, it follows you. Forever. Even when no one ever catches you, blames you, finds out—there really is no escaping the truth.

Maybe that's because you never imagined that you'd be capable of such a thing. That kind of violence. Look, even now, how mealy-mouthed you are about it. *That kind of violence.* So polite.

But you murdered someone in cold blood. There's no getting around that fact.

Premeditated? No. That's part of the story, too. But when you let yourself remember that night, you feel the rage coursing through your body, so hot it could have melted your skin. It was an act born from pure fury. So, no malice aforethought. But hardly an accident, either.

Justified? You're not even sure what that word means anymore.

You are far from the only person to blame, though. There were other people involved, the bloodshed an inevitable result of too many strong feelings at cross-purposes. Of love—in the wrong forms at forbidden moments. A collision course of fates.

And so you can distance yourself from each step that led up to the exact moment of violence, but not the moment itself. Not your part in getting there, either. Certainly, you had a role.

It could have ended so differently, too. But you were reckless. You all were, and now you've paid the price.

It's easy to forget that we are all just animals in the end, grunting and huffing and struggling to survive. It's our base instincts that get us in trouble. Lust, rage, love, jealousy—not reason. Not rational thought.

So much blood, though, my God. You never once thought about what it would be like to kill someone, except abstractly. The way everyone does. *Could I do something like that if I had to? To save my own life? To protect someone I loved? To guard what was mine?* But who really considers the details? How hot the blood will be on your hands, how strange it feels when it sprays your face. That it will spray in the first place. How it will look on the white bathroom tile after you've smeared it with a rag, because right after it happens, before the horror has fully sunk in, you will be thinking you can clean up the mess.

You will be thinking you can make the whole thing go away.

When you find you cannot, you run. From it, from yourself. Maybe you land somewhere on the far end of the world. Sparkling canals on one side, a colorful city on the other. A safe haven, a hiding place. Freedom.

But then you realize: You may have gotten away, but you're still *with* it. Or, rather, it's still with you. Wherever you go, it'll be there, living inside of you. Forever. Even now, sitting here in the warm spring sun, your eyes fixed on so much beauty, the horror of that night still sits in your chest. Some nights, as you lie alone in the dark, you can almost feel it beating like a second heart, nestled right up next to your own.

After

GRETCHEN

SEPTEMBER 12

Gretchen was terribly cold, even with the fleece she'd thought to grab. The thin cotton pajamas she was wearing underneath were just, well, too thin. And the police station thrummed with supersonic air-conditioning. Overkill, even with the worst of the summer heat and humidity still smothering New York City like a damp, foul-smelling blanket. Perhaps this was a tactic the police used—freezing people into confessing.

She suspected the East Village precinct was nicer than others. It had clearly been remodeled. The lovely historic facade retained, but the interior fully modernized. It was harsh and sterile, though, with fluorescent lighting, cold linoleum floors, and too much steel. The whole place also smelled of some chemically lemon cleaner, which, while nauseating, was probably better than many alternatives. Still, three hours of inhaling it was far too much. But that's how long Gretchen had been sitting on an uncomfortable metal bench, ignored, as uniformed officers milled about, along with a handful of men (and one woman) in dress pants who must have been detectives. Everyone had been calm and polite, at least. Even the extremely intoxicated young man in handcuffs who'd been brought in wearing an oversize hooded sweatshirt and very baggy jeans had nodded Gretchen's way. Sheepishly, too, as though she were his disappointed fifth-grade teacher.

Then again, she might have imagined that. At this point, Gretchen wasn't seeing anything clearly. She and Richard had been startled from a dead sleep by the sound of the doorbell. Unfamiliar in their Upper East Side co-op, where people didn't ring your doorbell in the middle of the night. People didn't ring your doorbell at all without permission to come to your door. No, the doormen called up in a civilized fashion from the lobby to announce visitors. And Gretchen's "visitors" almost always came during regular business hours—dry cleaning, weekly flower arrangements, Fiona the decorator, occasionally her Pilates instructor, Ilya. Friends they were hosting for drinks or dinner. Or the children's friends, back when her kids still lived at home. Now both smack in the middle of their fifties, Richard and Gretchen had lived in the same elegant doorman building on the corner of Fifth and East Eighty-Eighth for the past twenty-two years, overlooking the Guggenheim and just a stone's throw from the Met. They'd moved there when the girls were just ten and eight and Becks not yet born.

Twenty-two years of being safely tucked away from the chaos of the world, their life as close to perfect as one could reasonably get. Gretchen knew it. She'd known the whole time how wonderful it was. Not a hundred percent perfect. Nothing was perfect. But their family was good. It was her life's work, and it had all turned out the way she'd hoped—so much warmer and more genuinely loving than her own family. A low bar. Her adult life had rendered her childhood a cold and distant memory. And Gretchen had been appropriately grateful. Wasn't that supposed to protect them from this kind of...tragedy?

Apparently not. The second she had heard the frantic ringing of their doorbell—obnoxious, really, given that there was no real emergency—she knew something terrible had happened. It *was* terrible, as it turned out. But it had *already* happened. At this point, there was nothing that could be done to prevent it anymore, which made all that noise seem calculated to make them panic.

It had worked.

Gretchen had bolted upright, heart racing. *The kids*. That was her first thought. Once you had children, they were forever your first thought. But her children were grown now or, in Becks's case, mostly grown, which meant when tragedy came, it came knocking.

Gretchen had put a hand on Richard, warm and breathing steadily in the bed next to her. He had been her second thought. Safe and sound. Thank God.

There were another two rings, followed by pounding—five, six times in a row. *Was the building on fire?* Gretchen didn't smell smoke. She shook Richard, hard. Oh, to be the dad.

"Richard," she said loudly. "Wake up! Someone is at the door!" He still wasn't moving. She shoved him and shouted in his ear, "Richard!"

Finally, he startled awake. Then another pound on the door. Richard rolled out of bed in his pajama pants and an old Dartmouth T-shirt. "What's going on?"

"I don't know."

Together, they raced down the steps of the duplex. Gretchen held her breath as Richard yanked open the door. Five, maybe six uniformed police officers were clustered in the hallway with Joseph, the young night doorman, at the far back, gesturing helplessly. A tall, slim officer with a wispy mustache was in front. The way he was standing with his thumbs hooked in his belt loops made him look like a male stripper impersonating an officer.

"Richard Falk?"

Richard blinked and shook his head as if waking from a dream while Gretchen left her body entirely. Such a show of force: One of the children was dead—that must be it. If they never said which one, maybe it wouldn't be real. But she was floating somewhere up near the ceiling now. Too far away to do anything to stop this conversation. Too far away to scream. She opened her mouth twice, but no sound came out.

"Are you Richard Falk?" the officer repeated, louder and more insistent.

"Yes, yes, sorry," Richard said finally, gripping the back of his neck. "Has something happened to one of our kids?"

The room rocked to the side. Gretchen pressed a hand against the wall to stay upright.

“No, sir. That’s not why we’re here.” The officer held out a piece of paper. “We have a warrant to search the premises.”

In the long, confusing moments that followed, Gretchen saw things from a blurry distance, heard them in fits and starts. Richard saying there had to be a mistake, the officers saying he could read for himself. It was all in the warrant.

Richard stared at the paper for the longest time, trying hard to keep his face neutral. Gretchen knew the expression of her husband of thirty-four years trying, for her sake, *not* to have an expression. It was worse than worry.

Sweat began to bead on Gretchen’s lip. “What is it?”

“Frankie is dead,” Richard said finally. And when he looked at her, the agony in his eyes was overwhelming.

And just like that, Gretchen knew that their life, perfect as it had been, was over.

“Who?” Her heart was a bomb pulsing against her breastbone.

“Frankie Callahan. From the Kilimanjaro trip. Looks like she’s been murdered.” He tried to clear his throat. “That’s what this seems to be suggesting.”

She edged closer to see for herself: *Murder in the Second Degree; Evidence of items belonging to Frankie Callahan*. “What are they doing *here*, though?”

Richard looked dumbfounded. “I have no idea.”

—

As the police officers began their search, Richard called Scotty. Scotty handled white-collar defense, but he was the only criminal lawyer they knew. He had gone to Africa with Richard and the rest of the Dartmouth crew. He

had met this woman. Frankie. But Scotty didn't answer, so Richard tried Bruce Barone instead. Bruce handled the family's trusts and estates; he was with Wachtell, one of the best firms in the city, and Gretchen had known him for years. He'd done work for her parents—they could trust him, at least—and, most important, he picked up. Richard held the phone slightly away from his ear so Gretchen could listen in.

"If they have a search warrant, they have a right to search," Bruce instructed. "Have they said why they're at your apartment?"

"No," Richard said. "But the warrant says someone was murdered."

"Cooperate, but *do not* make any statements of any kind, Richard." Bruce sounded very concerned. "Do not answer a single question."

Richard handed Gretchen the warrant after he hung up with Bruce. "We probably shouldn't even talk to each other," he said. "Not with them..." He gestured toward the officers making their way around the apartment with focused precision.

One of the two detectives, Raul Reyes—short but with very good bone structure, she couldn't help noticing, and thick eyelashes—asked if Gretchen and Richard might come down to the precinct. You know, just voluntarily, to talk while the officers conducted the search. They were trying to gather as much information as they could about Ms. Callahan, and they had a few questions.

"Either way, we'll need you to leave until they're done."

Gretchen waited for her husband's polite but firm no, per Bruce's instructions.

"Yes, of course," Richard said without missing a beat. "Anything we can do to help."

Gretchen didn't say a word as they grabbed their jackets and one set of keys. They were not allowed to take anything else from the house, on account of the search. They could change before leaving the apartment, but only in the presence of a police officer. In Gretchen's case that meant a glowering tattooed woman who was, quite frankly, physically intimidating. Being in a room alone with her sounded unpleasant enough, but removing her clothing

while this woman *watched*? Absolutely untenable. She opted for grabbing her fleece instead.

She and Richard didn't speak again until they were alone together in their car. Well, not alone—Sam was there, driving them downtown to the East Village precinct, which was apparently the one near the...whatever had happened. But Sam had worked for them for fifteen years. He was practically family.

"Bruce said not to answer any questions," Gretchen said finally, "so why are we going down there?"

"Because *I* have questions. I want to know why they're at our house." Richard sounded more angry than upset, luckily. "Besides, I don't care what Bruce says. It would seem suspicious to say no. Would you have preferred that?"

"Of course not," Gretchen said, but she felt a little attacked, which hardly seemed fair under the circumstances.

They were quiet for a moment. Then Richard exhaled heavily and reached for her hand. "It can't hurt to be cooperative," he said. "To keep things... calm."

"But *why* are they searching our house?" she asked again. Just the thought—those police officers with their hands all over her things, their things. Their *family*. It was a violation.

He turned to look at Gretchen, his eyes searching pointedly. "I don't know, Gretchen." A pause. "Do you?"

"Don't be ridiculous," Gretchen snapped, freeing her hand to tuck her hair behind her ear.

"They must have a reason, though. A decent one, because a judge gave them a warrant. That's why I want to talk to them—poke around a bit and find out."

And so here they were, still down at the police station at nearly six in the morning. They'd casually separated them right away. *Mr. Falk, you can come right this way. Mrs. Falk, someone will be right out for you in a minute.* As though this were all a routine matter. "A minute" had turned into

hours; Gretchen had been sitting there for what felt like a lifetime, shivering in her Natori pajamas.

It didn't seem right for them to be purposely making her uncomfortable while she waited. She'd already mentioned how cold she was to at least three different officers, one of them a woman. And yet even that female officer hadn't done anything but frown and shake her head as if the solution weren't as simple as adjusting the thermostat or offering Gretchen a blanket or an extra jacket. Gretchen had also asked to see Richard at least a half dozen times and been ignored. Or, rather, assured: *Any minute, any minute—they're just wrapping up*. They were stalling, obviously.

Gretchen could also picture Richard in the interrogation room, doing his part, charming the pants off the officers, trotting out his man-of-the-people credentials. Taking his sweet time, his wife forgotten on a rock-hard bench in a frigid lobby, along with Bruce's warnings about not talking to the police. She glanced at the clock on the wall. Three hours and eleven minutes now! Enough was enough. This had gone on too long. They needed a lawyer, and Gretchen still hadn't been able to reach Scotty—her calls kept rolling straight to voicemail. She called Bruce again.

"What are you doing down at the police station? I expressly told Richard *not* to answer questions!" Bruce shouted. He was a very good attorney but a very unpleasant man who was particularly condescending to women. Not surprising, given that he and her father had gotten on famously. He'd even drafted their prenup, the one she'd been mortified her parents had insisted on. "What the hell is wrong with him? Richard should know better." That was *exactly* how her father had talked about Richard. "I mean, there is stupid and then there is—"

"Oh, shut up, Bruce!" It was one thing for *her* to be upset with her husband, but she wasn't about to listen to Bruce criticize him.

She suppressed a smile as she registered Bruce's gasp on the other end of the line. Men always underestimated Gretchen, but she'd learned long ago to use their low expectations to her advantage. When to play demure, and when to bite back.