

“Parental Controls”  
by  
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Chapter One

The Safe and Sound Manor was “. . . state-of-the-art security while nestled among not so state-of-the-art oak trees and walkways”. Martha’s children were willing to buy into the pitch, mainly due to the overwhelming convenience of proximity to their homes and, more importantly, not having to spend too much of their inheritance.

Her children bragged about the surroundings for weeks before Martha’s delivery day to what she was repeatedly told would be her “nice, new home”. Her first thoughts, when told this, were to wonder why she needed one. She thought her nice, old home was good enough for the last thirty one years. Yet, suddenly, it involuntarily became obsolete. It also, suddenly, became so very empty. She was now expected by many to just erase from her memory the everyday corners of her familiar home. She knew she would instinctively be looking for all the objects in her life in non-existent places. And that she would probably be doing this for the remainder of her life. So she kept at bay hopes that this would be just a matter of months, and not, God forbid, of years. Even at her comfortably mundane home, she was more and more feeling the weight of 84 years of living and eight years without her husband. She felt it in her movements and in her mind. Even with everything at her

fingertips, life was taking its toll on her willingness to reach for those things that keep a heart beating: food, water, or people. And, as Martha watched for weeks as those things were removed from her sight, she could feel what little interest she had in living begin to disappear. And there was a perverted kind of irony in the whole process. The people who had spent the least amount of time with her, namely her children, were the ones making the decisions on what constituted her most treasured keepsakes. And not only did they have to be her most treasured, but also painfully few in number. Her daughter did most of the packing, thinking it's probably customary for a woman to pack another woman's things. Although Martha's sons had been married for many years and were accustomed to manhandling their wives' valuables, somehow, their mother's belongings were to be touched by feminine hands only.

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It was a Saturday afternoon when Martha was taken away. As she sat in what her late husband claimed was "the most comfortable chair known to man", she dutifully waited for her instructions for her next move. The orders came mostly from her eldest son, Tom. "This old place is gettin' to be awful hard to maintain, Mother . . . I just don't have the time anymore". Martha tried to enter the conversation by saying, "Thomas, your father made arrangements with your brother to take care of it because he had experience in construction". "I know, Mother, but I just never know when, or if, he's going to get around to it". Martha tried to finish her thoughts by stating, "James has always tried to be here when I called, but he has a family to take

care of . . . “ “And I don’t?”, said Tom, once more defending himself against the relentless attributes of his little brother. He continued, “You always talk about James as if he’s the only one with responsibilities”.

When he seemed finished, Martha calmly nodded just to acknowledge his comment, but said nothing more. She knew that, once he crossed into these waters, it was pointless to try to persuade Tom of anything, let alone stopping this madness taking place in her life. So she leaned back in her husband’s chair and watched as the home of many decades turned into just another vacancy. She tried to take solace in the fact that, before she and Tom were able to buy it, it was also considered a vacancy. But this sense of comfort lasted only until she looked around and saw the freshly painted walls and the empty refrigerator with it’s door standing wide open. And she sat trying desperately to recall what her home looked like even a month ago. All of the tangibles were now residing only in her fragile and short-term memory. One of the few furnishings left was the built-in bookshelves and she tried to remember when her husband built them for her. “Thomas”, she said, “do you remember when your father put those shelves in?”. Tom glanced at them and responded, “Yes, I guess I do. I think it was when I was in college, wasn’t it?”. Her daughter, Sarah, spoke up, “No, I don’t think so, because I wasn’t married yet. That was before I met Greg”. Tom continued, “I’m pretty sure it was the same year I went to school, because I hadn’t met Margie yet either”. Martha quietly listened to their recollections and marveled at how all things were invariably related to their lives. As if what was happening to them was their only frame of

reference. Then she secretly remembered they were both wrong. And went back to her task at hand. She wanted to get as much of her home committed to memory as she could in the time she had left.

She was then told she needed to stand up and get ready to leave. “Mom”, said her daughter, “. . . it’s only going to get harder the longer you wait”. Martha grabbed onto both arms of her walker grasping to stand up but her legs weren’t there yet. Her daughter asked, “Do you think you need the pills that the doctor had us pick up?”. Martha had already been given a sedative by the homecare nurse that morning but still said, “I think so, dear. I don’t know”. Her daughter stared at the pill bottle for several seconds before placing it on the kitchen counter to be revisited. She then whispered to her brother, “Tom, take a look at these”. Tom joined her in the kitchen and loudly responded, “You mean the pills we picked up at the doctor’s?”. “Yes, I can’t even pronounce this. Do you know what they are?”. Tom stated, “Isn’t there any paperwork with it?”. “No”, said Sarah, “I guess they just assumed, because she’s been taking them awhile, that we would know what they are”. “Well, I think they’re some kind of sedative, anything to get us through this”, said Tom. He continued, “If you’re not comfortable with giving them to her, just give her half of one”.

Martha sat down again and noticed the look of annoyance on the face of her son. She also noticed he was looking to see what time it was by a clock that had always been over the mantelpiece, but was no longer there. He realized this and began fidgeting with his wristwatch.

Her daughter tried, once more, to figure out what to do. And, even though she knew nothing about the drugs given to Martha earlier that day, she proceeded to follow her brother's wishes. Martha swallowed the half pill offered to her by her daughter. And started her struggle to stand up and walk through a doorway for the last time. She grabbed the walker again and, at the same time, so did her grandson. "Let me help you, Grandma. We'll sit in the car together". The sound of his voice was just what Martha needed to hear. That friendly and familiar manner and the winning smile gave her the strength to care. She was able, with his help, to make her way to the door and the waiting transport van. She began to feel less in the moment because of his words. It was as if he innately knew what she needed to hear in this outrageous day. She followed his lead as he folded her walker and lifted her by the arm into the van. She slowly sat down on the bench seat nearest the window. She was back to back with the front passenger so, as a polite gesture, tried to make it a soft landing. Once in, her grandson placed the folded device at her feet. He then climbed past her and sat next to her. As they began their drive to their destination, she could see through the back windows the rose bushes she had worked so hard to make grow. Her husband had tried to convince her they were a lost cause, but she stayed with it and was able to produce only one hearty rose. And that dark, red flower was now within frame of one of two tiny windows. And, when they turned the corner, the rose vanished.