

# Chapter 1

## **Janice**

I don't know where Ric is. He's disappeared. He's officially a missing person, but that would suggest I miss him, and I don't. Not officially.

The police wonder about that, why Ric's secretary was the one to file the report. But it's not like she didn't ask me, it's not like I'm already so far out of the equation that I'm not a consideration when it comes to the whereabouts of my husband.

"Do you know where he is?" she had asked in a tone that barely lifted to form a question.

"No," I'd said, and with that, it seemed the question of Ric's whereabouts should have been over and done with, but it wasn't. Instead, the police came banging at my door, asking to see a husband they knew wouldn't be there.

And maybe it's routine to ask the wife to come down to the station and to put her into one of these windowless rooms with the one-way glass. I don't mind. It's a chance to talk about Ric without annoying my friends: How would it look if I continued my one-toned moan even after he's disappeared? "The man's missing, and yet listen to her bitch." To have someone listen further would require a therapist. The police are saving me the expense.

"Did he treat you properly?"

LILLA CSORGO

I savour the question. I suppose it shouldn't be surprising that I've ended up treating the interrogation room as a confessional. A confessional with a mirror so I can check my performance. A confessional with two priests: Detectives Stinson and O'Malley, and why not? With good Irish names like that, there must be vestiges of Catholic in them. Perhaps the vestige of Italian in me recognizes it. They even have a bit of the priest about them – kindly, world-weary, solicitous, ready to hear my sins. O'Malley, the woman – which I guess is not that priestly – is particularly interested. In truth, it's all a bit gossipy. We should have a pot of tea or some girly fruit-flavoured martinis. We should go to a bar afterwards to pick up men who are too young for us, but instead O'Malley and Stinson change their tack.

Not right away, mind, but just as I feel I'm hitting my stride, walking that precarious line between rant and sensitive monologue, somewhere between the ridiculous and the sympathetic.

“So, essentially, Ric stopped coming home,” I conclude.

“But he still came home at night?” Stinson snorts.

“Yes.”

“So what you're really saying is that he wasn't always home in the evenings?”

I nod. “And the weekends. Some – most – weekends.”

“So what you're really saying,” Stinson pauses to look at his notes, “is Ric stopped staying home on Saturday mornings so you could ‘lollygag’ in bed and then go for fresh bagels and coffee?”

I don't even nod this time. It's then that O'Malley decides to become the bad cop. Just like on TV. I should have known she'd turn out to be the aggressive one. Petite myself, I know how much rage a small body can contain. I envy her the outlet. Not that it helps. Not that it's ‘productive,’ as Ric would say.

Ric cares about being productive.

## THE JANUS AFFAIR

“Didn’t you wonder where he was?” she asks. “Didn’t you wonder what he was up to? All those evenings, all those weekends?”

“At work,” I say.

O’Malley huffs. “I have to say, I am a bit incredulous that a man could work quite that much. Incredulous that an intelligent woman would believe him.”

That’s the word she uses, the exact one. Intelligent. How would she know? Is it the glasses? I don’t feel intelligent. Here I am, a grown woman, with a good job, a house in an affluent neighbourhood, in the seventh year of my marriage to a respectable man, staring at myself in the darkened glass of a one-way mirror wondering who might be staring back.

“I could always get in touch with him. He was always reachable.”

“Always?” Stinson asks, but the tone is incredulous.

“Always.”

“Except for now, of course,” O’Malley notes.

O’Malley and Stinson stare me down. All signs of priestliness are gone.

“I’m not sure what went wrong.” I try again. “Ours was a happy marriage. To start.”

I can see my answers disappoint them. They expected more of me, believed they were right to do so given the way I walked in here with the flinching face of a woman with secrets to tell. And all they’re getting is my magazine-inspired attempts to understand what went wrong in my marriage. Sure, I can talk and talk about Ric, but they don’t really care about Ric, or at least not in isolation. They’re looking for facts, evidence even, that Ric has something to do with Amber’s disappearance. I know that. Ric and Amber disappeared at the same time.