



SOMEONE IS WATCHING YOUR EVERY MOVE.

STALKER

JAMES C. MACINTOSH



When Susan Cook is involved in an auto accident, her world is turned upside down. Beginning with harassing phone calls, a vile word scrawled on her home and a break-in, where an ominous message is left behind, Susan realizes that someone is not only stalking her, but, seems to know everything about her. When her husband is jailed for assaulting a suspect, she finds herself at the mercy of the stalker.

Stalker

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STALKER

James C. MacIntosh

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CHAPTER ONE

Wednesday, October 17th

The early afternoon sun warmed Susan Cook's face, as she strolled to the Westgate Mall parking lot and her waiting car. Her day had gone well, despite being a busy one. Now, with the last of her errands done, she looked forward to heading home and chugging a hot cup of tea before the kids came home from school.

Susan tossed the plastic pharmacy bag onto the passenger seat, as she got into the Ford Explorer. The warmth of the car felt good, as she settled into the soft leather driver's seat. October afternoons in New England had a tendency to cool suddenly and this one was no different.

As she began to drive out of the parking lot, a slow moving funeral procession plodded along in a westerly direction, on the main thoroughfare, West Main Street, backing up the homeward bound shoppers into a snake-like line at each exit. Susan's car was at the head of her line and she glanced nervously into the rear view mirror, expecting at any moment to hear the impatient blaring of horns behind her. The line of cars in the procession seemed endless and Susan wondered who the deceased person might be, to gain such a large contingent of mourners.

Unexpectedly, a police officer aboard a three-wheeled motorcycle propelled his vehicle past the procession, in an attempt to reach the front of the line. When the line of traffic heading east stopped passing by, Susan knew that the officer had stopped that traffic, in order to allow the hearse to make a left turn into Greenland Cemetery. This was a good thing, she thought, as it would allow her to pull out unimpeded, once the procession had passed the mall lot.

When at last, the final vehicle containing mourners had gone by, Susan nosed her car out into the street, hoping someone would let her cut into the line. The first car honked loudly, speeding up, in order to keep her from joining the line. The second and third cars kept a close distance to each other, preventing her from merging. A quick peek at

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the rearview mirror revealed why; no one wanted to let Susan cut the line, because they knew there would be a steady stream of shopper's cars joining hers.

Finally, one gracious driver allowed Susan entry and the thankful woman gave a quick wave of her hand, as she pulled in front of the kindly driver.

After a while, the traffic began to thin out and Susan pressed her foot a bit harder on the accelerator pedal, anxious to get home and kick back for a few minutes. She still had almost an hour before her two children, Rachel and Benjamin would make their loud entrance through the front door. They would, more than likely be arguing over some issue with their friends, neither willing to back down from their position on the debate. The quarrel would continue, until the name calling began, at which point Susan, her head on the verge of another migraine, would dismiss them both to their rooms. She knew the scenario all too well. Rachel, the older of the two, at thirteen, had always been a headstrong girl, quick to anger and eleven-year-old Ben seemed to delight in pushing her buttons.

It was for this reason that Susan's moments alone had become a welcome departure from that turmoil that her children created each afternoon and she pressed harder still, on the pedal. She knew she was going too fast for this thickly settled neighborhood of Orton, Massachusetts and kept her eyes focused on the road, in order to be prepared to slow, or stop suddenly.

Noticing the thirty-five mile per hour posted speed limit sign, Susan glanced at her speedometer, relieved to see that she was only driving six or seven miles an hour over that. No cop would bother to stop her for such a minor infraction, would they? As if to provide an answer to her thought, a Massachusetts State Police sedan came toward her and as the vehicle passed by, she stole a sideways glance at the trooper behind the wheel, who took no notice of her presence in the opposite lane. Her first impulse was to press her foot a little harder on the accelerator pedal. Still she resisted. This was, after all, a thickly settled area and, at any moment, someone might step from behind a parked vehicle.

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Susan's eyes picked up a sudden movement to her left and she realized, in astonishment, that another driver was pulling out of a side street to her left and directly into her lane of travel. She reacted quickly, slamming her right foot down hard on the brake pedal, causing an instantaneous screeching, as the tires gripped the roadway, burning off the rapidly heating rubber and leaving a black snake-like trail behind. She flinched instinctively, as the split-second realization that a collision was imminent, invaded her thought process.

Yanking hard on the steering wheel, Susan swerved the vehicle sharply to the right, causing the two passenger side wheels to lift from the pavement. Feeling the car lifting off the ground, she quickly turned the wheel in the opposite direction and slammed into the right side of the other vehicle.

She heard a loud explosion and felt a stinging punch to her face, as the steering wheel's airbag inflated. It deflated almost as swiftly and Susan watched, in horror, as the car in front of her rolled onto its roof and made a complete flip onto all four wheels again. Pieces of one, or both of the vehicles went flying through the air, landing almost noiselessly on the pavement. She sat, stunned, for a moment, struck by the knowledge that her day had suddenly gone terribly wrong.

Fearing the worst for the driver of the struck car, she grabbed her door handle and pulled on it, but the door didn't open. She fumbled for her seat belt connection and managed to undo it, before trying the door handle once more. Still, the door wouldn't budge.

Susan saw wisps of either smoke, or steam rising from the front of her car and began thinking that her engine may have caught fire. She lifted herself over the center console and into the passenger seat, where she tugged at that door handle. The latch released immediately and the door popped open.

Clambering from the open door, Susan rushed to the other car, an older Toyota sedan. As she approached the driver's door, she saw a man sitting behind the wheel, apparently dazed by the collision. She started to raise her hand, in an attempt to knock on the window,

but the door suddenly opened and the man slowly began to step from the vehicle.

“Are you all right?” Susan called out to the man.

He took two or three steps toward her, nodding in the affirmative, before asking; “Where the hell did you come from?”

Taken back by the query, Susan stammered out her reply.

“I....I....was just driving down the road.”

Slightly irritated by his question, she asked; “Why did you pull out in front of me like that? You could have been killed.”

The man answered swiftly.

“I never saw you! You must have been flying!”

In a moment of candor, Susan admitted; “I guess I was going a little over the speed limit. But, you should have been more careful when you pulled out.”

Seeing an approaching figure to her right, Susan turned and was amazed to see that a small crowd had gathered in less than a minute since the crash. She saw two cars pulled off to the right side of the road and the man walking toward her seemed to possess a confidence which indicated that, perhaps he was an off-duty cop, or fireman. Assertively, the new arrival initiated eye contact with Susan first, then, the other driver.

“Do either of you folks have any injuries?”

Susan shook her head vigorously, letting the man know that she was all right. The other driver turned stiffly toward the newcomer and said; “I told her I was okay, but, now I’m not so sure. I’m starting to feel a bit woozy.”

Guiding the man off to one side, he gently pushed the unsteady man against the side of Susan’s SUV, which now rested alongside the curb in her original travel lane.

“I’m an EMT.” said the self-assured man. “Do you mind if I evaluate you for any injuries?”

The other driver told him he didn’t mind, but, that he was sure it was just a reaction to the excitement of the accident.

Susan paced nervously in the middle of the roadway, as the traffic began to back up. She heard the sound of a siren in the distance and was relieved that the police were on their way. An

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overwhelming sensation that she was the target of all of those staring eyes had filled her with anxiety and she wished she could make all these people go away.

She decided to walk around her car and retrieve her driver's information from the glove box, so she would have it ready for the responding officer when he or she arrived. As she bent to open the small compartment, Susan glanced through the driver's window at the growing crowd of gawkers standing on the opposite side of the road. Uncomfortable with their piercing stares, she pretended to be busy looking for her papers, as she aimlessly rifled through road maps and gas receipts, hoping to continue doing this until the police arrived.

As if to provide relief for her anxiety, an Orton Police cruiser, its roof lights pulsing out a brilliant strobe of iridescent blue, silently pulled alongside the accident scene, leaving a small passageway off to his right for vehicles in the eastbound lane to pass through. As he exited his cruiser, the patrolman gave a momentary glance at Susan and the other driver, before signaling for the waiting cars in the eastbound lane to proceed. He then waved both hands palms down, alerting the vehicle operators to proceed cautiously.

Susan watched, as he spoke into his lapel mike, apparently calling for another officer to help with the traffic flow.

He approached her, inquiring, as the off-duty EMT had, if she was injured.

"No, I'm fine. I'm just a little shaken up, that's all."

When she had said this, Susan noticed that her hands were shaking noticeably. She looked up from them and presented the officer with a half-smile, blushing, as she said; "I guess you can see that though."

"I need to see your license and registration, please?" he said, in a detached tone.

Although she had already collected her registration papers, which she held in her hand, Susan needed to return to the SUV to retrieve her license from her purse. As she handed the papers to the officer, he intoned; "Describe to me how the accident happened."

Slowly, Susan described how the man in the other vehicle had abruptly pulled out in front of her, resulting in the collision. The officer made several notations in a small pad of paper, before glancing off to his left. She read the name 'Dragon' on his stainless steel nameplate and wondered if that really was his name.

"Is that the other operator?" he asked.

"Yes, that's him. The man with him is an EMT, or, so he said."

"Why don't you have a seat in your vehicle, Ma'am? I'm going to take a statement from him."

The officer nodded in the direction of the man standing on the opposite side of her SUV.

"I'd just as soon stand here, if that's okay. My door won't open, anyway."

Gently placing his hand on Susan's arm, the officer guided her to the side of the road, where he advised her to stay, for her personal safety. The area where he positioned her was about thirty feet from the other operator and Susan guessed it was done deliberately, so she would not be able to hear their conversation.

She watched, as the men spoke. The other driver became quite animated at one point, waving his arms up in the air in an apparent gesture of futility. She saw Officer Dragon nod his head, as if in understanding and felt a sudden tinge of dismay. It looked as though he may have been convinced that the accident was Susan's fault.

From her right, she caught sight of another cruiser pulling up to the scene. The officer behind the wheel positioned his vehicle diagonally facing east, in an attempt to protect the accident site from oncoming traffic. Susan watched, amazed at the efficient way in which this latest officer to arrive managed to start a slow, steady flow of traffic in both lanes.

Soon, Officer Dragon was standing at her side, his stone-like face not giving off any indication as to what he may have learned from his conversation with the other operator.

"Wait here for a few more minutes." He said to her, as he turned toward his parked cruiser. Susan watched him veer from his intended path and in the direction of the officer directing traffic. The men

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spoke for a few moments, before Officer Dragon went and sat in his cruiser.

As she stood waiting, Susan witnessed another cruiser pulling up to the site. This one contained two uniformed officers, one male and one female. Both of them proceeded directly to Officer Dragon's cruiser, where they briefly spoke with him, before breaking away in different directions. The female officer proceeded to the lower end of the accident scene and positioned herself there, helping to coordinate the flow of traffic with the latest officer to arrive, thereby keeping it going smoothly. The male went to the trunk of his vehicle and opened it, removing a long tape measure on a reel. Officer Dragon now joined him and the two busied themselves measuring the skid marks left by Susan's SUV. Dragon recorded the measurements on a clipboard and returned to Susan, as a box-style ambulance arrived at the scene.

"Is there someone you can call for a ride home, Mrs. Cook?"

Unnerved by wondering why the men needed to measure her tire marks and distracted by the ambulance, Susan hesitated, before answering.

"What.....um.....yes.....yes, there is someone, thank you."

As Dragon turned to walk away, Susan called out to him.

"Wait, please?"

Dragon turned to face her.

"Why did you guys have to measure my tire marks?"

The officer provided her with a slight, smile, an obvious attempt to set her mind at ease, as he said; "Oh, its standard procedure, Ma'am. The other operator told us that you admitted to him that you were speeding. It would....."

Incensed, Susan shrieked; "He what?"

Dragon remained calm.

"At first indication, the marks seem to prove it out. We'll need to go over the measurements with our reconstruction team, though."

Susan's eyes flashed angrily.

"And what does that mean?"

In a matter of fact tone, Dragon answered; "It means that if they determine you were speeding, you may be issued a citation."

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Crossing her arms, Susan fumed.

"I don't believe this! That jerk tells you something that I said in confidence and he turns it against me."

That same half-smile appeared on Officer Dragon's face.

"Let that be a lesson to you, Mrs. Cook. You should never admit culpability to another operator in an accident. He told us that you freely admitted you were driving too fast for this posted zone."

Susan raised her voice again.

"I told him that because I felt bad for him. He seemed shaken badly from the impact and I thought it might....that bastard!"

Deciding she was becoming too agitated, Dragon led her over to the back of his cruiser.

"Ma'am, I need you to calm down. I realize you're upset, but, why don't you call for your ride now?"

Susan fumbled in her purse for her cell phone, her hands shaking noticeably once again. She removed her phone and hit the speed dial number for Ralph and Emma Blanton, her elderly next door neighbors. The phone was answered on the third ring.

"Hello?" Emma Blanton said, in a somewhat shaky voice.

"Mrs. Blanton, this is Susan Cook. Is Ralph nearby?"

"Why, yes dear, he is. How are you, my dear?"

"Not doing too well at the moment, unfortunately. I've been involved in an accident and I need a ride home. My car is damaged badly."

The shock in Emma Blanton's voice was undeniable.

"Oh, my! Are you all right, dear?"

"Yes, I'm fine. I'm just a little bit shook up, that's all."

"Oh, I do wish there were no such thing as motor vehicle accidents. They bring so much misery to...."

Susan raised her voice ever so slightly, in an attempt to bring the older woman back to the matter at hand.

"Mrs. Blanton, can you get Ralph, please?"

"Certainly, sweetheart. Hold on a bit. He's in the den cleaning out one of the bookcases. He gets on these little projects and buries himself in them all the time. He oftentimes skips lunch, then, complains to me how hungry he is...."

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“Mrs. Blanton.....please?”

“Oh, forgive me, dear. Ralph always says that I tend to go on and on, sometimes. What was it that you wanted, dear?”

Susan remained understanding, in her patience with her elderly neighbor.

“I need to speak with Ralph.”

“Oh, but of course, dear. I’ll get him.”

A sharp clunk indicated to Susan that the woman had set the phone down on the small maple table in the foyer near the front door, the same table which had held the same old rotary phone for as long as Susan could remember. She listened to the frail voice of Emma calling out to her husband of 52 years and a pang of sadness struck her softly. Emma had recently been diagnosed with Early Stage Alzheimer’s Disease, but, Susan knew it had quickly progressed to a deeper level. Her husband, an old retired Marine, always appeared to Susan as if he were twenty years younger than his adoring wife. Ralph Blanton, at 76 years of age, was nothing short of a physical specimen. He still maintained his buzz cut hair style and his well-toned body was a subject of much admiration from the local elderly female population.

After an agonizingly extended wait, Susan heard heavy footsteps falling on the hardwood flooring in the Blanton’s front hallway. The grumbling voice, obviously annoyed at the interruption to his chore, was unmistakably that of Ralph Blanton.

Gruffly, he spoke into the phone; “Yeah?”

“Ralph, this is Susan.”

Immediately, the harshness left the throat of the older man, as he recognized the voice of his friend and neighbor.

“Susan! Emma didn’t say who was calling. Is everything all right?”

“Not really. I’ve been involved in an accident and my car will have to be towed. Would you be able to pick me up and take me home? I’m on West Main Street where it intersects with Clapton Street.”

“I’ll be right there. Susan, are you okay? You weren’t injured, were you?”

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“No, I’m fine, Ralph. Just a little nervous, that’s all. I really appreciate this. Thank you. I didn’t have anyone else to call. Jeremy is on a business trip and I need to be home when the kids get home from.....”

Ralph Blanton cut her short.

“Susan, I’m glad I can help. Now, you just stay out of harm’s way until I get there.”

“Thanks, a bunch, Ralph.”

As she returned her cell phone to her purse, Susan observed two EMT’s loading the other driver into the waiting ambulance. She was struck with a sense that this man might just be putting on a good acting job. She wanted to walk up to Officer Dragon and tell him that; tell him that this man was fine before he got there and now he’s faking this injury. But, she knew that wouldn’t fly well. She’d end up looking like a nut job. Dragon had already warned her to calm down. She didn’t want to give him any reason to think she was out of control.

Susan glanced down at the piece of paper Dragon had handed her earlier. It contained the information from the other driver. His name was David Howard Pierson. His address was listed as 1217 West Main Street, Apt. 3C, Orton, MA. Susan knew the address. It was a large apartment house near the center of town, popular with transient workers, especially in the warmer months, when the tourist trade increased.

After watching the ambulance pulling away, Susan carefully folded the paper and placed it in her purse, next to her cell phone. Her mind brought forth a few random thoughts about the man in the ambulance.

“What’s your game, buddy? Are you trying to build up a false injury, in case I’m found to be at fault? Yeah, you’d probably have a legitimate lawsuit against me, wouldn’t you? Either way, I’ll probably be hearing from your lawyer in a few days. I can’t believe I fell for your bullshit line about being okay. Then, when that guy that said he was an EMT showed up, you suddenly got woozy. At least I’m well covered, insurance- wise, if that’s what you’re looking for.....”

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“Ma’am?”

The strong voice of Officer Dragon startled Susan. He handed her another small piece of paper with a phone number written on it, next to the name of the towing company, Independent Towing.

“This is where your vehicle is being towed. They’re located on Falwell Street just past the....”

“Yes, I know where they are.” Susan interjected.

“Is there anything you need to remove from the car now?”

“No. I’m all set, thank you.”

When she had said this, Susan remembered her bag from the pharmacy, which was lying on the front seat of her vehicle.

“Oh, there is one thing I need to get.”

She glanced nervously at Dragon, not wanting to reveal to him that the item she needed to retrieve was, in fact, a filled prescription. Hurriedly, she ran to the passenger side door, opening it and reaching inside for the bag.

As she returned to where Officer Dragon stood, Susan saw, out of the corner of her eye, the Toyota Camry belonging to Ralph Blanton pulling up on the opposite side of the roadway.

“Oh, my ride’s here.” She said, to no one in particular.

Dragon offered to escort her across the street, as the traffic was once again flowing heavily. Once they reached the other side, she asked; “Will someone notify me about the accident? You know.....to tell me who was at fault?”

“Once our investigation is complete, both parties will be notified. Don’t forget to send in your own report to the DMV, Ma’am.”

Nodding, Susan climbed into the passenger seat of her neighbor’s car, taking one last glance at the tow truck, as it slowly lifted the front end of her vehicle into the air.

She thought that, once she got home, she just might add some whiskey to her cup of tea.

CHAPTER TWO

The click of the front door latch alerted Susan that her children had gotten home from school and were now in the house. Surprised that she didn't hear the sounds of their daily argument, she stepped from the kitchen into the living room, where Rachel and Benjamin were quietly removing their jackets.

"Mom, where's your car?" Ben asked.

Sighing deeply, Susan responded as calmly as she was able.

"I had a little accident today and they had to tow my car to a repair shop."

It was Rachel who asked the obvious question.

"Are you okay?"

Warmed by her daughter's concern, Susan smiled.

"Yes, honey. I'm fine. My car isn't though."

"What happened?" Ben wanted to know.

After explaining how the accident came about, Susan was taken aback by Ben's quick grasp of the situation.

"I think this guy's gonna sue you, Mom. Otherwise, why would he say he was okay and then tell the ambulance guys that he was hurt?"

"He didn't say he was hurt, Ben. He just said he felt a little woozy."

Ben digested this information, before restating his opinion.

"I still think he's gonna sue you. Mr. Haskell says the whole world is crazy with lawsuits."

Susan bristled slightly at this comment.

"Mr. Haskell should stick to teaching American History and not be so quick in making generalized statements."

Abruptly, Rachel asked; "Is Daddy coming home tonight?"

Seemingly disappointed with the answer she was about to give her daughter, Susan replied; "No, honey. He won't be back till late tomorrow afternoon."

Unhappy upon hearing this, the young teenager answered; "I hate it when he goes on those business trips."

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Wrapping an arm around the shoulders of her daughter, Susan tried to raise her spirits.

"I know you miss him, honey. I do too. But, he'll be home before you know it. And he doesn't have any more trips planned until late next month; and that one's only going to be an overnighther."

Ben decided to put in his two cents worth.

"Mr. Haskell says that absentee spouses are a major cause of divorce in modern-day families."

With her jaw dropping, Susan stared, disbelieving, at her son.

"Ben, why on earth would you say something like that? Your father is not an 'absentee spouse' and he and I are very happy together. Now, I am going to insist that you stop quoting Mr. Haskell on every subject that we discuss."

Ben kept on; "But, I was just saying....."

"Well, don't say anything else, unless it's something positive. I'm sick of hearing all those negative observations from that man. Wait until the next Parent-Teacher conference. I'm going to let him know that I don't appreciate him filling your head with all of this nonsense."

"Aw, Mom, I hope you're not gonna embarrass me."

"No, I'm going to embarrass *him*."

Rachel's worried look was evidenced by her next question.

"Mom, what if that guy *does* sue us? Will we..... like.....lose our house and stuff?"

"Listen you two; no one is going to sue us, period!"

Again, Rachel asked; "But, if we have no car, how are you going to do the shopping and take us places?"

In her calmest manner, Susan reassured her children.

"Mr. Blanton is going to drive me to the insurance company tomorrow and they'll send me to a rental car agency. We'll use that until our car is repaired. So, there's no need for either of you to concern yourselves with these questions."

Satisfied with their mother's explanation, Rachel and Ben headed for their rooms, where they would stay until Susan called them for supper.

CHAPTER THREE

At 8:45 a.m. Ralph Blanton rang Susan's front doorbell. When she answered the door, she was dressed and had her paperwork ready.

After exchanging pleasantries, they drove in Ralph's car to the Greenbrae Insurance Company office, where the accident report was filed and instructions were given to Susan as to which car rental agency was contracted with Greenbrae. Ralph then drove her to the rental agency and, once he knew she was all set, left for his home.

Two hours later, Susan pulled the Dodge Caravan into her driveway and waved to Ralph Blanton, as he raked leaves in his yard. She carried a small bag of groceries, having stopped on her way home.

As she approached the front door, a strange sensation came over her; a sense that something was awry. She turned to take a hurried glance at Ralph, who was bending to lift a shovelful of leaves into a large paper leaf sack. Continuing to turn, Susan scanned the neighborhood, half-expecting to see someone approaching on the sidewalk. There was no one there.

She looked down at the doorknob, contemplating the possibility that someone may have entered her home and was now waiting inside, hidden and ready to pounce upon her when she came in.

"You've been watching too many of those small-town crime movies, lady." She thought, as she turned the key in the lock.

Warily, Susan stepped into the foyer. She let the door remain open wide, so Ralph would hear her if she needed to scream. The living room lay directly ahead of her, just beyond the small corridor leading from the entranceway.

Staying close to the wall, she edged her way along, feeling more than a little foolish for her fearfulness. The living room area was still and welcoming. Susan continued on, into the kitchen, where she set the grocery bag down on the large island in the center of the room.

At last, the uneasiness dissipated and she walked quickly to close the front door completely. Removing her jacket, she hung it on

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a hanger in the clothes rack and headed back to the kitchen, to unload the bag.

As she picked up a jar of mayonnaise, her eyes were drawn to something scrawled in red letters on the sliding glass door that led from the kitchen to the outside deck. The mayonnaise jar slipped from Susan's hand and fell to the floor, the plastic jar bouncing harmlessly several times, before rolling to a stop against the refrigerator kick plate.

In large, uneven lettering, the word 'bitch' was displayed across the upper section of glass, about chest high, where it was sure to be seen by the target of the malicious message.

Susan crossed the kitchen, coming to a stop before the glass door. Unlocking the sliding bar, she opened the door and stepped outside, where she reached out with her index finger and touched the letter 'b'. It felt sticky to the touch. Carefully placing her finger beneath her nostrils, Susan sniffed the substance beneath her nose. It was lipstick.

A sudden anger arose inside her, as she re-entered the house and hurried across to the kitchen sink. Grabbing two or three sheets of paper towels, Susan doused the towels with liquid detergent, running them under warm water for several seconds.

"Those damn kids! I wonder which one of her friends she managed to piss off this time."

Quickly removing the offending word, Susan thought for a moment, before running to the clothes rack and grabbing her jacket. She hurried to the rental car and jumped in, oblivious to the surprised stare from her neighbor, Ralph. She backed the car out of the driveway and sped to the end of Dunham Street, turning left onto Park Avenue. She stayed on this road for one half mile, before making another left onto Causeway Street, which she followed for only a short distance, crossing into the opposite lane and pulling the rental car off into a turnout, headed in the wrong direction.

Susan stepped from the vehicle and looked down at the ground. She walked into the wooded area in front of her and continued on, her eyes remaining focused on the worn path which she walked. She knew this path led directly to the wooded area behind her home and

was also aware that this location had been used often by the older children in the neighborhood, as a meeting and drinking spot. It would also have made a perfect place for an escape route for the young hoodlums Susan felt were responsible for the offensive scrawl on her sliding door.

Unable to find any clues, or even any indication that someone had recently walked along the pathway, Susan turned and headed back to the car.

Once she'd returned home and put away the rest of the groceries, she poured a cup of leftover breakfast coffee and heated it in the microwave. Sitting at the kitchen table, she thought of what she would say to Rachel when she got home from school. She wondered what Jeremy was doing at this moment and realized she was missing him.....a lot. When he'd phoned last night, he knew immediately, by the sound of her voice, that something had gone wrong during the day.

Susan had done her best to trivialize the events of her day. It didn't work. Jeremy sensed there was something about the accident that troubled her and he finally coaxed a few more details from his wife.

"I couldn't believe that guy would do that. He totally shifted the blame for that accident onto me and worse, the police investigator seems to believe him!"

Before her husband could reply, Susan continued; "Then, that damn cop had the nerve to tell me to calm down. He actually walked me over to his patrol car, as if he was afraid I was about to lose it and attack the other driver, or something like that."

Well aware that his wife was in possession of a quick temper, Jeremy pieced together in his mind what actually happened and made an attempt to downplay her last statement.

"I'm sure he just wanted to keep you from becoming too upset over the whole thing, Honey. After all, just being in an accident is upsetting, especially if you've never been involved in one before."

Susan quickly replied; "Well, if I'm ever in another, you can bet I'll keep my mouth shut."

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Laughing easily, Jeremy said; “In another month, you’ll be laughing about this, believe me.”

Susan liked the way her husband was able to make her feel more relaxed, whenever she’d get stressed out about something. Already, his soft voice had soothed her and they ended their conversation on an upbeat note. She placed the phone on the table, as she tried to stifle a yawn.

Without realizing, Susan’s head lowered gently onto her arms, as she fell asleep at the kitchen table. It was the sound of her children’s voices which woke her an hour later.



When Susan Cook is involved in an auto accident, her world is turned upside down. Beginning with harassing phone calls, a vile word scrawled on her home and a break-in, where an ominous message is left behind, Susan realizes that someone is not only stalking her, but, seems to know everything about her. When her husband is jailed for assaulting a suspect, she finds herself at the mercy of the stalker.

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