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SHARI LAPENA

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF
THE COUPLE NEXT DOOR

EVERYONE HERE IS LYING

A NOVEL

ALSO BY SHARI LAPENA

The Couple Next Door

A Stranger in the House

An Unwanted Guest

Someone We Know

The End of Her

Not a Happy Family



*Everyone
Here
Is Lying*

SHARI LAPENA

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Also by Shari Lapena

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To Julia

Acknowledgments

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One

They don't speak as William walks her to her car parked behind the motel; they never leave their cars out front, where they might be recognized. No one will ever know they were here. At least, this is what they tell themselves, what they have told themselves every time over the last few months as their affair kindled, burned brightly. But now it has been abruptly snuffed out. By her. He didn't see it coming.

They'd met at their usual motel on the outskirts of town, where no one knows them. It's on the main highway. They had to be discreet. They couldn't meet in their own homes because they're both married, and she, apparently, wants to stay that way. Until half an hour ago, he hadn't really had to think about it. He feels like he's had a rug pulled out from beneath his feet, and he still hasn't regained his balance.

They stop at her vehicle, and he leans in to kiss her. She averts her face. Despair and desperation take hold, the realization that she really means it. He turns quickly and walks away, leaving her standing there, keys in her hand. When he gets to his car, he looks across to her, but she is already starting the engine and driving away in a burst of speed, as if making a point.

He stands there, bereft, watching her go. Something had seemed different about her today. He always arrived at the motel first, checked in, paid in cash, got the key, and texted her the unit number. Today, when she knocked and stepped inside, she'd pulled him close and kissed him more hungrily than usual. There were no words. They tore off each other's clothes the same as always, made love the same as always. Afterward, she usually lay with her head on his chest, *listening to his heart*, she'd say. But today she

sat up against the headboard and stared straight ahead, looking at the two of them in the bureau mirror. She'd pulled the white sheets up to cover her breasts. Also unlike her.

She wasn't listening to his heart anymore.

"We have to end this," she said.

"What?" He looked up at her, startled, then pulled himself up to sit beside her. "What are you talking about?" He studied her—such a beautiful woman. The bone structure, smooth blond hair, and natural glamour reminiscent of an old-fashioned film star. He felt a surge of alarm.

She turned her head and looked at him then. "William, I can't do this anymore. I have a family, kids to think of."

"I have kids too."

"You're not a mother. It's not the same."

"It didn't stop you before," he pointed out. "It didn't stop you today."

She looked angry then. "You don't have to throw it in my face," she answered.

He softened, reached for her, but she shrugged him away. "Nora, you know I love you." He added, "And I know you love me."

"It doesn't matter." There were tears in her lovely blue eyes.

"Of course it matters!" He was panicking. "It's all that matters! I'll divorce Erin. You can leave Al. We'll get married. The kids will adjust. It will be fine. People do it all the time."

She looked at him for a moment, as if surprised he suggested it. They'd never spoken about the future; they'd been living in the moment. In their pleasure and unexpected happiness. Finally, she shook her head and brushed the tears from her face. "No, I can't. I can't be that selfish. It would destroy Al, and I can't do that to my kids. They'd hate me. I'm sorry."

Then she'd risen from the bed and quickly started putting her clothes back on, while he watched her in disbelief. That things could change so quickly, so fundamentally, without warning—it was disorienting. She was reaching for the door when he cried, "Wait," and hurriedly began to dress. "I'll walk you to your car."

And that was it.

Now he gets into his car to drive down the highway back to Stanhope. It's 3:45 in the afternoon. He's too upset to go back to his medical practice offices or to the hospital. He has no patients scheduled. It's Tuesday; he always reserves the afternoon for her. At loose ends, he decides to go home for a bit instead. The house will be empty. Michael will be at basketball practice, and Avery has choir after school. His wife will be at work. He'll have the house to himself, pour a much-needed drink. Then he'll leave again before anyone gets home.

Their house is at the top of Connaught, a long, pleasant residential street that ends in a cul-de-sac. He's still thinking about Nora as he uses the button on the car's visor to open the garage door. He drives in and presses another button to close the door behind him. She'll be home by now, in her own house farther down the same street, maybe already regretting her decision. But she hadn't looked as if she would change her mind. He wonders now if she has had other affairs. He'd never asked. He'd assumed he was the only one. He realizes he doesn't really know her at all, even though he thought he did—even though he loves her—because he'd been taken completely off guard.

He puts the key in the lock of the side door leading from the garage into the kitchen. He thinks he hears a sound and pauses. There's someone in the kitchen. He opens the door and finds himself looking at his nine-year-old daughter, Avery, who is supposed to be at choir practice.

She turns and stares at him; she'd been reaching for the cookies on the counter.

For fuck's sake, he thinks, *can he never get a moment to himself?* He doesn't want to deal with his difficult daughter right now.

"What are you doing here?" he asks, trying to keep the annoyance out of his voice, but it's hard. It's been a shitty day. He's just lost the woman he loves, and it feels like he's lost everything.

"I live here," she says sarcastically. And she turns away from him and reaches for the cookies, opening the package with a crinkly sound and plunging her hand in.

“I mean, aren’t you supposed to be at choir practice?” he asks, reminding himself to breathe. To not get upset. She’s not being deliberately obnoxious, he tells himself, she can’t help it. That’s just the way she is. She’s not wired like other people.

“They sent me home,” she says.

She’s not allowed to walk home from school alone. She’s supposed to be picked up by her older brother; basketball practice and choir end at the same time, at 4:30. He sees the time on the stove clock—4:08.

“Why didn’t you wait for your brother?”

She’s stuffing Oreos into her mouth. “Didn’t want to.”

“It’s not always about what *you* want,” he tells her crossly. She eyes him warily, as if sensing his darkening mood. “How did you get in the house?”

“I know about the key under the front mat.”

She says it as if she thinks he’s stupid. He tries to control his growing temper. “Why did they send you home? Was choir canceled?” She shakes her head. “So what happened?” He finds himself wishing that Erin were here, so that she could handle this. She’s much better at it than he is. He feels a familiar pain starting between his eyes, and he pinches the bridge of his nose and begins moving restlessly around the kitchen, tidying, putting things away. He doesn’t want to look at her because the disrespect in her expression infuriates him. He thinks of his own father: *I’ll wipe that smirk off your face.*

“I got in trouble.”

Not today, he thinks. *I can’t deal with this shit right now.* “For what?” he asks, looking at her now. She just stares at him, stuffing her face. And he can’t help it, he feels that familiar spurt of anger at his daughter. She’s always getting into trouble, and he’s had enough. When he was a kid, his father smacked him when he misbehaved, and he turned out fine. But it’s different nowadays. They have coddled her. Because the experts say she needs patience and support. What they’ve done, he thinks, is enabled her to become a spoiled brat who doesn’t understand limits.

“Tell me what happened,” he says, a warning in his voice now.

“No.” And it’s that defiance in her voice, as if she holds all the cards, as if he’s nothing and has no authority over her at all, that sets him off. In three long strides he’s across the kitchen, in a blind rage. Something inside him has snapped. It happens so fast, faster than conscious thought. He strikes her across the side of the head, harder than he meant to. She goes down like a stone, the expression of defiance wiped from her face, replaced by shock and then vacancy, and for a fraction of a second, he feels satisfaction.

But it’s short-lived. He stands over her, horrified at what he’s just done. He’s shocked, too, that he could do this. His hand is stinging with pain. He’d only meant to slap her, he tells himself now, to slap some sense into her. He hadn’t meant to *strike* her. He bends down over his daughter, where she is slumped across the floor; she cringes away from him. He quickly but gently pulls her up to a sitting position, with her legs out in front of her and her back against the kitchen cupboards. “I’m sorry, honey! Avery, I didn’t mean it! I’m so sorry.” The words come in a rush. He’s blinking back tears.

She looks back at him blankly, not mouthy now. He’s sickened by what he’s done. He’s a decent man. A doctor, not a brute. He’s not his father. And he loves his daughter, he does. How could he have lost it like that? “I’m so sorry. I’ll make it up to you, Avery, I promise. I shouldn’t have done that. It’s just, I lost my temper—I’ve had a very bad day. I know that’s no excuse. You know I love you, sweetie. I love you more than anything.”

Her eyes are a bit glassy, but otherwise she seems fine. She looks away from him then, won’t meet his eyes.

His voice is pleading, and he hates the sound of it. “Look, I’m sorry. I know it’s unforgivable, but let’s not tell your mother. She has a lot on her plate right now.” Avery doesn’t answer; she won’t speak to him. He pauses and says, “And we won’t tell her you came home by yourself, because that will get her upset, and you know she will have to give you consequences. You can say you walked home with a friend.”

She ignores him, staring sullenly straight ahead. He thinks she’ll tell, and it’s what he deserves. There’s going to be a bruise. He supposes he could try to deny it; there’s no predicting who Erin will believe. His daughter has a history of telling lies. He does, too, but his wife doesn’t know that.

He stands up and backs away from Avery. He has to get out of here, away from the sight of what he's just done. He's filled with self-loathing. He can feel his little girl's reproach, imagines her calculating. She has something to use against him now. One more nail in the coffin of his marriage. He turns around and heads back out to the garage.

But when he gets to the car and reaches for his keys, he hesitates.