

SHARI LAPENA

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF

THE COUPLE NEXT DOOR

SOMEONE
WE
KNOW

A NOVEL

ALSO BY SHARI LAPENA

The Couple Next Door
A Stranger in the House
An Unwanted Guest

SOMEONE WE KNOW

SHARI LAPENA



DOUBLEDAY
CANADA

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To Manuel

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PROLOGUE

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 29

She's standing in the kitchen, looking out the large back windows. She turns toward me—there's a swing of thick, brown hair—and I see the confusion and then the sudden fear in her wide brown eyes. She has registered the situation, the danger. Our eyes lock. She looks like a beautiful, frightened animal. But I don't care. I feel a rush of emotion—pure, uncontrolled rage; I don't feel any pity for her at all.

We're both aware of the hammer in my hand. Time seems to slow down. It must be happening quickly, but it doesn't feel that way. Her mouth opens, about to form words. But I'm not interested in what she has to say. Or maybe she was going to scream.

I lunge toward her. My arm moves fast, and the hammer connects hard with her forehead. There's a grisly sound and a shocking spurt of blood. Nothing comes out of her mouth but a gasp of air. She starts to drop even as she raises her hands up toward me, as if she's pleading for mercy. Or maybe she's reaching for the hammer. She staggers, like a bull about to go down. I bring the hammer down again, this time on the top of her head, and there's extra force this time because her head is lower. I have more momentum in my swing, and I want to finish her off. She's on her knees now, crumpling, and I can't see her face. She falls forward, face down, and lies still.

I stand above her, breathing heavily, the hammer in my hand dripping blood onto the floor.

I need to be sure she's dead, so I hit her a few more times. My arm is tired now, and my breathing labored. The hammer is covered in gore, and my clothes are streaked with blood. I reach down and turn her over. One eye is smashed. The other is still open, but there's no life in it.

MONDAY, OCTOBER 2

Aylesford, a city in New York's Hudson Valley, is a place of many charms—chief among them the historic downtown along the Hudson River and two majestic bridges that draw the eye. The Hudson Valley is renowned for its natural beauty, and across the river, an hour's drive on mostly good highways can get you deep into the Catskill Mountains, which are dotted with little towns. The Aylesford train station has ample parking and frequent trains into New York City; you can be in Manhattan in under two hours. In short, it's a congenial place to live. There are problems, of course, as there are anywhere.

Robert Pierce enters the Aylesford police station—a new, modern building of brick and glass—and approaches the front desk. The uniformed officer at the desk is typing something into a computer and glances at him, holding up a hand to indicate he'll just be a second.

What would a normal husband say? Robert clears his throat.

The officer looks up at him. "Okay, just give me a minute." He finishes entering something into the computer while Robert waits. Finally, the officer turns to him. "How can I help?" he asks.

"I'd like to report a missing person."

The officer now gives Robert his full attention. "Who's missing?" "My wife. Amanda Pierce."

"Your name?"

"Robert Pierce."

"When was the last time you saw your wife?"

"Friday morning, when she left for work." He clears his throat again. "She was going to leave directly from the office to go away with a girlfriend for the weekend. She left work as planned, but she didn't come back home last night. Now it's Monday morning, and she's still not home."

The officer looks at him searchingly. Robert feels himself flush under the man's gaze. He knows how it looks. But he must not let that bother him. He needs to do this. He needs to report his wife missing.

"Have you tried calling her?"

Robert looks at him in disbelief. He wants to say, *Do you think I'm stupid?* But he doesn't. Instead he says, sounding frustrated, "Of course I've tried calling her. Numerous times. But her cell just goes to voice mail, and she's not calling me back. She must have turned it off."

"What about the girlfriend?"

“Well, that’s why I’m worried,” Robert admits. He pauses awkwardly. The officer waits for him to continue. “I called her friend, Caroline Lu, and—she says they didn’t have plans this weekend. She doesn’t know where Amanda is.”

There’s a silence, and the officer says, “I see.” He looks at Robert warily, or as if he feels sorry for him. Robert doesn’t like it.

“What did she take with her?” the officer asks. “A suitcase? Her passport?”

“She was packed for the weekend, yes. She had an overnight case. And her purse. I—I don’t know if she took her passport.” He adds, “She said she was going to park at the station and take the train into Manhattan for a shopping weekend with Caroline. But I went through the parking lot first thing this morning, and I didn’t see her car there.”

“I don’t mean to be insensitive,” the officer says, “but . . . are you sure she’s not seeing someone else? And lying to you about it?” He adds gently, “I mean, if she lied to you about going off with her friend . . . maybe she’s not really missing.”

Robert says, “I don’t think she would do that. She would tell me. She wouldn’t just leave me hanging.” He knows he sounds stubborn. “I want to report her missing,” he insists.

“Were there problems at home? Was your marriage okay?” the officer asks.

“It was fine.”

“Any kids?”

“No.”

“All right. Let me take down your particulars, and a description, and we’ll see what we can do,” the officer says reluctantly. “But honestly, it sounds like she left of her own accord. She’ll probably turn up. People take off all the time. You’d be surprised.”

Robert looks at the officer coldly. “Are you not even going to look for her?”

“Can I have your address, please?”

ONE

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 14

Olivia Sharpe sits in her kitchen drinking a cup of coffee, gazing blankly out the glass sliding doors to the backyard. It's mid-October, and the maple tree near the back fence is looking splendid in its reds and oranges and yellows. The grass is still green, but the rest of the garden has been prepared for winter; it won't be long before the first frost, she thinks. But for now, she enjoys the yellow sunlight filtering through her backyard and slanting across her spotless kitchen. Or she tries to. It's hard to enjoy anything when she is coming to a slow boil inside.

Her son, Raleigh, still isn't up. Yes, it's Saturday, and he's been in school all week, but it's two o'clock in the afternoon, and it drives her crazy that he's still asleep.

She puts down her coffee and trudges once again up the carpeted stairs to the second floor. She hesitates outside her son's bedroom door, reminds herself not to yell, and then knocks lightly and opens it. As she expected, he's sound asleep. His blanket is still over his head—he pulled it over his head the last time she came in, a half hour ago. She knows he hates it when she tells him to get up, but he doesn't do it on his own, and what is she supposed to do, let him sleep all day? On the weekends she likes to let him relax a little, but for Christ's sake, it's midafternoon.

"Raleigh, get up. It's after two o'clock." She hates the edge she hears in her voice, but she expends so much energy trying to get this boy out of bed every day, it's hard not to resent it.

He doesn't so much as twitch. She stands there looking down at him, feeling a complicated mix of love and frustration. He's a good boy. A smart but unmotivated student. Completely lovable. He's just lazy—not only will he not get out of bed on his own, but he doesn't do

his homework, and he doesn't help with chores around the house without endless nagging. He tells her he hates her nagging. Well, she hates it, too. She tells him that if he did what she asked the first time, she wouldn't have to repeat herself, but he doesn't seem to get it. She puts it down to his being sixteen. Sixteen-year-old boys are murder. She hopes that by the time he's eighteen or nineteen, his prefrontal cortex will be more developed, and he will have better executive function and start being more responsible.

"Raleigh! Come on, get up." He still doesn't move, doesn't acknowledge her existence, not even with a grunt. She sees his cell phone lying faceup on his bedside table. If he won't get up, fine, she'll confiscate his cell phone. She imagines his hand flailing around, reaching for it before he even takes the covers off his head. She snatches the phone and leaves the room, slamming the door behind her. He'll be furious, but so is she.

She returns to the kitchen and puts his phone down on the counter. It pings. A text message has popped up. She has never snooped in her son's phone or computer. She doesn't know his passwords. And she completely trusts him. But this message is right there in front of her, and she looks at it.

Did you break in last night?

She freezes. What the hell does that mean?

Another ping. **Get anything good?**

Her stomach flips.

Text me when ur up

She picks up the phone and stares at it, waiting for another message, but nothing comes. She tries to open his phone, but, of course, it's password protected.

Her son was out last night. He said he'd gone to a movie. With a friend. He didn't say who.

She asks herself what she should do. Should she wait for his father to get back from the hardware store? Or should she confront her son first? She feels terribly uneasy. Is it possible Raleigh could be up to no good? She can't believe it. He's lazy, but he's not the kind of kid to get into trouble. He's never been in any trouble before. He has a good home, a comfortable life, and two parents who love him. He can't possibly . . .

If this is what it looks like, his father will be furious, too. Maybe she'd better talk to Raleigh first.

She climbs the stairs, the earlier love and frustration shoved abruptly aside by an even more complicated mix of rage and fear. She barges into his room with his phone in her fist and yanks the covers off his head. He opens his eyes blearily; he looks angry, like a wakened bear. But she's angry, too. She holds his cell phone in front of him.

"What were you up to last night, Raleigh? And don't say you were at the movies, because I'm not buying it. You'd better tell me everything before your father gets home." Her heart is pounding with anxiety. *What has he done?*

Raleigh looks up at his mom. She's standing over him with his cell phone in her hand. What the hell is she doing with his cell phone? What is she blathering on about? He's annoyed, but he's still half asleep. He doesn't wake up just like that; it's an adjustment.

"What?" he manages to say. He's pissed off at her for barging in here when he's asleep. She's always trying to wake him up. She always wants everyone on her schedule. Everyone knows his mom's a bit of a control freak. She should learn to chill. But now she looks really mad. She's glaring at him in a way he's never seen before. He suddenly wonders what time it is. He turns to look at his clock radio. It's two fifteen. Big deal. Nobody died.

"What the hell have you been up to?" she demands, holding his phone out like an accusation.

His heart seems to skip a beat, and he holds his breath. What does she know? Has she gotten into his phone? But then he remembers that she doesn't know the passcode, and he starts to breathe again.

"I just happened to be glancing at your phone when a text came in," his mom says.

Raleigh struggles to sit up, his mind going blank. Shit. What did she see?

"Have a look," she says, and tosses the phone at him.

He thumbs the phone and sees the damning texts from Mark. He sits there staring at them, wondering how to spin this. He's afraid to look his mother in the face.

"Raleigh, look at me," she says.

She always says that when she's mad. Slowly he looks up at her. He's wide awake now.

"What do those texts mean?"

"What texts?" he says stupidly, playing for time. But he knows he's busted. The texts are pretty fucking clear. How could Mark be so stupid? He looks back down at the phone again; it's easier than looking at his mother's face. **Did you break in last night? Get anything good?**

He starts to panic. His brain can't come up with anything fast enough to satisfy his mother. All he can think of is a desperate, "It's not what it looks like!"

"Oh, that's good to hear," his mom says in her most sarcastic voice. "Because it *looks* like you've been up to a bit of breaking and entering!"

He sees an opening. "It's not like that. I wasn't *stealing*."

She gives him an enraged look and says, "You'd better tell me everything, Raleigh. No bullshit."

He knows he can't get out of this by denying it. He's caught like a rat in a trap, and now all he can do is damage control. "I did sneak into somebody's house, but I wasn't *stealing*. It was more like—just looking around," he mutters.

"You actually broke into someone's house last night?" his mother says, aghast. "I can't believe this! Raleigh, what were you thinking?" She throws her hands up. "Why on earth would you even do that?"

He sits there on his bed, speechless, because he doesn't know how to explain. He does it because it's a kick, a thrill. He likes to get into other people's houses and hack into their computers. He doesn't dare tell her that. She should be glad he's not doing drugs.

"Whose house was it?" she demands now.

His mind seizes. He can't answer that. If he tells her whose house he was in last night, she'll completely lose it. He can't bear to think of what the consequences of that might be.

"I don't know," he lies.

"Well, where was it?"

"I can't remember. What difference does it make? I didn't take anything! They won't even know I was there."

His mom leans her face in toward him and says, "Oh, they'll know all right."

He looks at her in fear. "What do you mean?"

“You’re going to get dressed, and then you’re going to show me the house you broke into, and then you’re going to knock on the door and apologize.”

“I can’t,” he says desperately.

“You can, and you will,” she says. “Whether you want to or not.”

He starts to sweat. “Mom, I can’t. Please don’t make me.”

She looks at him shrewdly. “What else aren’t you telling me?” she asks.

But at that moment, he hears the front door opening and his dad whistling as he drops his keys on the table in the hall. Raleigh’s heart starts to pound, and he feels slightly sick. His mother he can handle, but his dad—he can’t bear to think of how his dad’s going to react. He didn’t anticipate this; he never thought he’d get caught. Fucking Mark.

“Get up, now,” his mother commands, ripping the rest of the covers off him. “We’re going to talk to your father.”

As he makes his way down the stairs in his pajamas, he’s sweating. When they enter the kitchen, his dad looks up in surprise. He can obviously tell from their expressions that something’s up.

The whistling stops abruptly. “What’s going on?” his dad asks.

“Maybe we’d better all sit down,” his mother says, pulling out a chair at the kitchen table. “Raleigh has something to tell you, and you’re not going to like it.”

They all sit. The sound of the chairs scraping against the floor rips at Raleigh’s raw nerves like nails on a chalkboard.

He has to confess. He knows that. But he doesn’t have to tell them everything. He’s more awake now, better able to think. “Dad, I’m really sorry, and I know it was wrong,” he begins. His voice is trembling, and he thinks it’s a good start. But his dad’s brow has darkened already, and Raleigh’s afraid. He hesitates.

“What the hell have you done, Raleigh?” his father asks.

He stares back at his dad, but the words don’t come. For a moment, he feels completely paralyzed.

“He broke into somebody’s house,” his mother says finally.

“What?”

There’s no mistaking the shock and fury in his father’s voice. Raleigh quickly averts his eyes and looks at the floor. He says, “I didn’t break in. I snuck in.”

“Why the hell did you do that?” his father demands.

Raleigh shrugs his shoulders, but doesn't answer. He's still staring at the floor.

"When?"

His mother prods him with a hand on his shoulder. "Raleigh?"

He finally raises his head and looks at his dad. "Last night."

His father looks back at him, his mouth hanging open. "You mean, while we were here having friends over for dinner, and you were supposed to be at a movie, you were actually out sneaking into someone else's *house*?" His voice has grown in volume until, by the end of the sentence, his father is shouting. For a moment, there's silence. The air vibrates with tension. "Were you alone, or were you with someone else?"

"Alone," he mumbles.

"So we can't even console ourselves with the idea that someone else led you into this *completely unacceptable, criminal, behavior*?"

Raleigh wants to put his hands over his ears to block out his dad's shouting, but he knows this will only incense his dad further. He knows it looks worse that he acted alone.

"Whose house was it?"

"I don't know."

"So what happened?" His dad glances at his mom, and then back at him. "Did you get caught?"

Raleigh shakes his head, and his mom says, "No. I saw a text on his cell phone. Raleigh, show your dad the texts."

Raleigh unlocks and hands over the phone, and his dad looks at the screen in disbelief. "Jesus, Raleigh! How could you? Have you done this before?"

This is the thing about his father—he knows what questions to ask. Things his mother, rattled by shock, didn't think to ask. Raleigh *has* done it before, a few times. "Just one other time," he lies, avoiding his father's eyes.

"So you've broken into two houses."

He nods.

"Does anyone know?"

Raleigh shakes his head. "Of course not."

"*Of course not*," his dad repeats sarcastically. His dad's sarcasm is worse than his mom's. "Your friend knows. Who's he?"

"Mark. From school."

"Anyone else?"

Raleigh shakes his head reluctantly.

“Is there any way you might get caught? Security cameras?”

Raleigh shakes his head again, and looks up at his dad. “There weren’t any security cameras. I checked.”

“Jesus. I can’t believe you. Is that supposed to make me feel better?”

“They don’t even know I was there,” Raleigh says defensively. “I was really careful. I told Mom—I never took anything. I didn’t do any harm.”

“Then what were you doing there?” his dad asks.

“I don’t know. Just looking around, I guess.”

“*Just looking around, I guess,*” his dad repeats, and it makes Raleigh feel about six years old. “What were you looking at? Ladies’ underwear?”

“No!” Raleigh shouts, flushing hotly with embarrassment. He’s not some kind of a pervert. He mutters, “I was mostly looking in their computers.”

“*Dear God,*” his dad shouts, “*you went into people’s computers?*”

Raleigh nods miserably.

His dad slams the table and gets up. He starts pacing around the kitchen, glaring back at Raleigh. “Don’t people use passwords?”

“Sometimes I can get past them,” he says, his voice quavering.

“And what did you do, when you were *looking around* in people’s private computers?”

“Well . . .” and it all comes out in a rush. He feels his mouth twist as he tries not to cry. “All I did was write some prank emails from—from someone’s email account.” And then, uncharacteristically, he bursts into tears.