
MANIPULATION & DECEIT

By
Harold J. Fischel

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Editor and Typesetting by: solfire@phoenix-farm.com

Chapter One

“Darling, you have to help me. You know I didn’t do it!”

Reggie looked at her in surprise. She had never called him darling before. He knew he was one of her favorites. As his mentor, she had practically dragged him from lowly copy editor to art director. But calling him darling was totally unexpected. He stared at her through the thick glass separating them. Even without makeup, she was beautiful. As his boss, he adored and respected her. Even though she had often appeared in his secret sexual fantasies, he never thought in real life she would call him darling.

He tightened his grip on the phone. “Yes, I don’t believe it was you who killed Henry. But what can I do?”

Cristiana Faye pressed close to the glass partition. Her seductive facial expression had the effect on Reggie she intended. He was looking into the eyes of a confident, sexy woman, not one who stood accused of first degree murder. In her soft throaty voice, she said, “They killed Donald because, as CEO of Leisure Media, he stood in the way of us merging with Consolidated Publishing International. As his Senior Vice President I always supported Donald. No way was I involved in his murder.”

Seeing Cristiana dressed in a yellow prison jump suit made Reggie cringe. “I know. I believe you, but how can I help?”

“Work with my lawyer. Tell him we worked late the night of the murder. Tell him you were with me in my office at the time Donald was murdered. We were preparing the edition of OUTDOORS featuring the ten page photo spread your department put together.”

“Gosh, we worked on that edition so many nights. I can’t remember the exact dates.”

“I can. I remember exactly when we argued about which pictures to drop and those we would replace with shots you hadn’t submitted. It was the same evening Donald was murdered. The coroner estimated his time of death between eight and nine that evening. I remember that was the night you went out to pick up pizza for us and got me to try the chicken BBQ topping.”

Reggie remembered introducing Cristiana to BBQ chicken pizza, but he couldn't remember exactly which night that had been on. "For the life of me I can't remember the exact night I brought back BBQ chicken pizza. We worked on that edition of OUTDOORS for more than three weeks. Maybe even longer!"

"Honey, I remember exactly. I didn't like that pizza. You must remember! It's important that you do. It will save my life!"

Again, the intimate use of the word honey got to Reggie. "Well, if you say so, it must have been that night. I guess. Yeah, it must have been that night."

"I knew you'd remember! Please tell my lawyer you were with me in my office that night. You'll do that for me won't you, darling?"

Reggie was confused. It could very well have been that night. He wasn't too sure; but if Cristiana remembered it clearly, it had to be. "Sure Cristiana, if you say so, it was that night. I'll go see your lawyer in the morning and tell him I was with you that night. When did the judge set your trial?"

"That's not important. My lawyer will ask for an extension no matter what. But if you confirm you were with me on the night of the murder, I might get out of this hellhole sooner rather than later."

"Don't worry. I'll swear to it."

Christiana brought the phone close to her lips and whispered, "I'll make it well worth your while."

Chapter Two

“Mr. Valentine, has the DA’s office spoken to you about this?”

“No, sir. But please call me Reggie; everybody does.”

“Okay, but then you’ll have to call me Aiden. Getting back to my question, who besides Cristiana have you spoken to about this?”

“Nobody. She sent word she wanted to see me, and yesterday, during my visit, we came to the conclusion that on the night Donald Lewis was murdered, we were in her office working on the upcoming edition of our magazine OUTDOORS.”

“Did she tell you this or did you remember it and come to her with it?”

“A little bit of both. I don’t see why that is important.”

“It’s vital! Reggie, I defend my clients using everything I can dig up that can help them. But I’m also an officer of the court, and I don’t deal in fabrications. When I suspect a false declaration, I won’t use that statement in preparing my client’s defense.”

Aiden watched Reggie’s face turn red with anger. “Are you accusing me of lying? Are you implying that Cristiana and I made up the story that we were working together on the night of the murder?”

“Ho! Not so fast. I didn’t say or imply that I don’t believe you. It’s my job to get all the facts nailed down before the DA has a chance to pull them apart. As I see it, the following happened: Three weeks ago Mr. Donald Lewis was murdered. The police couldn’t pinpoint a suspect or even a motive. A week ago, the DA swore out a warrant for Cristiana’s arrest. In the warrant presented to the judge, they alleged Cristiana’s fingerprints were found in his apartment. A neighbor saw an unidentified woman leave Lewis’s apartment at the same time the coroner placed the time of death. The description of the unidentified woman was about six foot, slender, black hair. Cristiana matches that description. She’s just about six foot one, slender, and has black hair. The hallway outside the apartment was dimly lit, and the witness couldn’t make a positive identification from photos. When questioned by the police, Cristiana stated she’d been in Mr. Lewis’ apartment quite often to show him the final proof of one of your magazines and to get his approval before going to press. The DA ordered a line up, and the witness fingered Cristiana as the woman she saw leaving Mr. Lewis’ apartment. It was not just maybe; the woman was positive it was Cristiana.”

The room seemed to go cold as the lawyer continued. “At a hearing before a judge, Cristiana only repeated her statement about being in Lewis’s apartment often to deliver proofs of magazines that were ready for print. The judge ordered that she be taken into custody and held over for trial. I’m working on her bail hearing, and late yesterday I get a message from Cristiana that she has an alibi. And here you are to verify you were with her the night of the murder. This alibi was never mentioned to the police or at the hearing before the judge. How come?”

Reggie thought for a while before he answered. “I think I understand why. If you’ve never been involved with the police, it’s devastating to have cops barge in and arrest you for murder. All of us at the office were still recovering from the shock that our CEO had been murdered. None of us could figure out how and why it happened. Least of all Cristiana who worked directly under him. Out of nowhere, she is accused of being the perpetrator. Of course she’s not going to say something she is not absolutely sure of. If, in her confusion, she was mistaken about the exact day we put together the final edition of one of our many magazines, it certainly would be used against her. She would be accused of lying. So, she wanted to double check with me. And, yes, she’s right. That night we were in her office putting together the magazine. I’ll swear to that. We even remembered what type of pizza we ate.”

“Okay. If you two are sure you were together working in Cristiana’s office that night, I’ll try to get her out on bail.”

Chapter Three

“Why in the hell are you getting involved? You know the bitch is lying.”

The argument erupted during dinner, and Reggie couldn't calm down his wife, Julia. “Ever since she got out on bail, you've been following her around like a puppy.”

“You're just angry because she opposed the merger. But it's done; drop it. Besides, Donald Lewis was the one holding up the merger, and she supported him. It's not logical to think she'd have anything to do with his murder.”

“Oh Reggie, cut it out! For some reason, you refuse to see her for what she is, a conniving bitch. Most of the company supported the merger. Mr. Morales, the second Veep, supported it, and I know why.”

“Yeah because he wants Lewis's job.”

“That may be true, but it would be for all the right reasons. I'm in accounting, and I could see what was happening. By his reckless expansion to satisfy his ego, Lewis kept piling on the debt. We were so highly leveraged, we couldn't survive. I'm sure Cristiana knew it, but she kept sucking up to Mr. Lewis. God knows why.”

“She must have been aware of plans Lewis had to bring in extra finances and still keep control of the company.”

“Who knows what fairy tale she believed in? If she was so committed to those plans, why is she now sucking up to Jorge deSantos the chairman and major stock owner of Consolidated Publishing? Is it because Consolidated happens to be the company we merged with? More precisely, the company that absorbed us!”

“Hey, you could be a little more grateful! Cristiana brought you into this company. Are you conveniently forgetting that?”

“Yes she did. I was your sweet little wife who couldn't get a job, and Cristiana your great mentor helped me get a job in accounting. I'm well aware of that! But that doesn't mean I have to be blind to the facts. Lewis was leading our company down the drain, and for whatever reason, she supported him. And you were blind as to what was happening. You still are. You still follow her blindly, even supporting her claim you were together the night of the murder.”

“We were!”

“I’m sure you were. But you two weren’t working, you were screwing around!”

Furious Reggie jumped up. “What the hell do you mean by that!?”

“I mean just that. You must have been screwing her. All those nights the two of you supposedly worked on the magazines, just the two of you, no other staff, I think you were having sex.”

Reggie was beside himself. “How dare you? I work my ass off to get ahead in this company. Not only for me but to benefit both of us, and you sit there and accuse me of having sex with my boss!”

“You’re damn right. She’s beautiful, and you’re totally infatuated with her. She knows it and takes full advantage of it. By letting you fuck her, she keeps a strong hold over you.”

Reggie threw down the napkin he had been clutching. “Are you crazy? I swear I’ve never had sex with that woman. I’ve never touched her; she’s my boss.”

“You’re lying!”

In a fit of rage Reggie went storming out of the house.

Chapter Four

Aiden Harris spent weeks preparing for Cristiana's trial. Reggie Valentine was the main defense witness, and Aiden had him in his office once again to prepare him for the grilling he was bound to undergo once the DA got to cross-examining him. "He'll push you repeatedly, trying to get you to contradict yourself on some point. He'll concentrate on your memory of the exact night you were working with Cristiana in her office. However, he'll also dig into your relationship with her. While poking around your office, one of my investigators picked up on some talk that you and Cristiana are pretty chummy."

"Yes. She's my mentor. She's responsible for my rapid promotion to art director. We work closely on the layout of each of our magazines. She's responsible for getting the final approval from the CEO, but she always gives me full credit for the layout. My name appears in the credits of each magazine."

"I don't want to put you on the spot by asking some indiscrete questions, but I have to dig further into some rumors going around in your office. Have you been intimate with Cristiana?"

"Thanks for asking in such a gentle way. My answer is emphatically NO!"

"He'll badger you on the stand. He has to break you to prove his case."

"I understand. Sure, I find her attractive. What guy wouldn't? She's beautiful and very sexy. I know about the rumors. My own wife believes them. Recently I walked out on her when she accused me of being unfaithful. Because I insist I was with Cristiana the night of the murder, she has accused me of sleeping with Cristiana."

"That's going to hurt our case. If they call her she would be a bad witness for us. A wife can't be called upon to testify against her husband, but you're not the defendant so they can call her to talk about the relationship and your work hours."

"We can show our relationship was in trouble for a while. She strongly favored the merger with Consolidated. I didn't. Just like Cristiana, I, too, believed Donald Lewis had enough financial backing to save us from bankruptcy. I also knew our magazines had to be great. I worked my ass off to assure the layout, and especially the art work, was more attractive than our competition. Do you think I would risk my job by having sex with my boss? No way in hell! My wife hated all

the time I spent working on the magazines. Much of that entailed late nights with Cristiana. Julia became jealous of my work and the time I had to spend with Cristiana.”

“On the stand you’ll be under oath. Will you swear you never had sex with Cristiana?”

“Absolutely!”

“It will help Cristiana’s case if you manage to make up with your wife before the trial.”

“She quit her job and moved back in with her parents. She’s in Nebraska.”

Chapter Five

Reggie flew to Nebraska fully expecting to make up with Julia. They were high school sweethearts, but grew apart when she left for college and he joined the army. They reconnected when Julia moved to New York and was looking for a job. By that time, Reggie had left the service and was enrolled in evening classes at a renowned New York school of art. To support himself, he had been working full time at Leisure Media. By chance, he met Julia in a coffee shop near the art school. They started dating, and eventually, Reggie introduced Julia to his new boss, Cristiana. Cristiana had helped him transfer into the art department. She took him under her wing. When he asked her to help his girlfriend get a job at Leisure Media, she was happy to oblige.

From the airport Reggie went directly to see Julia. “Can I come in? I’d like to talk to Julia.”

“Come in, but I don’t think she’ll talk to you.”

Julia’s dad took Reggie into the living room, but made no attempt to call Julia. Instead he began lecturing Reggie. “Julia’s mom and I expected a lot more from you. You’re behavior shocked us. Julia was right to leave you.”

“Why? I didn’t do anything!”

“Come on; don’t make matters worse. Don’t lie to me.”

“Dad, I swear I did nothing wrong. Yes I spent a lot of time at the office working overtime on our magazines. Now I realize that wasn’t fair to Julia. I neglected her, and I’m deeply sorry.”

“Under these circumstances calling me Dad is somewhat out of place.”

“What? I’ve called you two Mom and Dad since my own mother got remarried and moved to Spain. My dad died during my freshman year in high school. You’ve been my mentor ever since, and now I can’t call you Dad?”

“Reggie, you should have thought about the consequences when you fooled around with that woman and betrayed my daughter.”

“That’s crazy! I never cheated on Julia. I love her. She’s upset because I spent a lot of time with my boss. She’s not that woman! Her name is Cristiana Faye and she’s been very nice to Julia. She’s my boss, and it was she who got Julia her job. We worked hard to save the company: I never touched my boss”!

“You don’t expect us to believe that do you?”

“No I don’t! And I’ll tell you what Mr. Johansson I don’t care! I never realized you were such pig-headed, narrow-minded people. You fooled me. I have too much respect for my boss to stand here and defend her honor. She’s a respectable lady, and for your information, I am an honorable guy and never cheated on my wife. Tell Julia that when she comes to her senses I’ll accept her apology.”

With that Reggie got up. He noisily slammed the front door when he left. Two weeks later, he was served with divorce papers. In filing for divorce, Julia listed adultery as the cause.

Chapter Six

During the trial, Reggie held up well during cross examination. He became indignant when the DA repeatedly asked if he'd been intimate with Cristiana. But he kept his temper and repeated over and over that there was never any sex involving him and Cristiana. Yes she was beautiful, and he thought she was very attractive. What man wouldn't? But he was not about to lose his job by flirting with her, let alone making sexual advances.

The woman who identified Cristiana during the line up as the woman she had seen in the hallway didn't do well as a witness. Neither did Julia.

Aiden Harris put it all together in his summation. "The prosecution wants you to believe that my client is guilty of murder based on very weak evidence. I will now take that same evidence to show you the opposite. She is not guilty. Take those fingerprints the DA relies on. We say, Yes, Cristiana Faye's fingerprints were all over Mr. Lewis's apartment. They had to be. It was Cristiana's job to deliver the proofs for all the magazines to Mr. Lewis's apartment. She did this frequently. Why bring the proofs to his apartment and not to his office? Quite simple. Mr. Lewis traveled a lot to visit overseas customers. That took him out of the office. Cristiana had a deadline to meet: the magazines had to go to print to meet their publication dates, so she took the proofs to his apartment when he arrived home from his trips. I repeat. It was her job! Now for the dear lady who claims to have seen Cristiana in the hall outside of Mr. Lewis' apartment on the day and at the approximate time of the murder... The police have confirmed that this lady couldn't identify Cristiana. I repeat she couldn't identify anyone from the pictures they showed her. Then, miraculously, she identified Cristiana in the lineup. Picture that ladies and gentlemen. She can't tell who she saw in the hall. Too dim to get a clear picture of the person. But she can definitely say it was her once you place her in a lineup. Cristiana is well known in that building. We have shown you that the night doorman didn't see her that day. He keeps a log as to who comes and goes after seven o'clock. Then, we have a jealous wife. Do we understand why she is jealous? Sure we do. Hubby works late a lot and neglects her. Even worse, hubby is working most of the time with a beautiful woman. Never mind she has no proof whatsoever that anything unprofessional happened between her husband and his boss. Her insecurity and feeling of neglect fire her imagination, and she is sure they are having sex behind her back. I feel sorry for her, but her testimony is based on pure nonsense."

He left that last word hang in the air to really sink into the jury's ears. Then continued, "During the trial, I was waiting for the prosecution to try to prove that my client had a motive. They couldn't. Why? Because Mr. Lewis's death was the last thing she needed. It was, and still is, against her interest. Mr. Lewis strongly opposed a merger with a large company called Consolidated Publishing. If the merger went through, Mr. Lewis was sure to be replaced by an executive from Consolidated. That executive would come in and replace much of Mr. Lewis's staff. Certainly his closest confidants. Mr. Lewis had hand-picked Cristiana Faye to be his first Vice President. She was his closest ally in the company. She helped him fight the merger. Give me a break, what possible motive could the DA see? No. Cristiana had only one goal, and that was to keep Mr. Lewis as CEO of the company and prevent the merger."

It took the jury only three hours to acquit Cristiana.

Chapter Seven

The merger went through at breakneck speed. Even before Cristiana's trial was over, Consolidated, by assuming all of Leisure Media's debt, completely absorbed the smaller company. Until he reached a decision as to who to appoint CEO of Leisure Media, Jorge deSantos installed one of the vice presidents as interim CEO. Victor Morales, who strongly supported the merger, was generally regarded as the prime candidate for the job.

Reggie thought he could see the handwriting on the wall and was expecting to be let go at any minute. He expressed his fear to Cristiana who didn't appear to share his concern. "Honey, stop worrying. I'll make sure your job is safe."

"How, Cristiana? You fought against the merger, so they might can you, too."

"Don't be such a worrywart. Sweetheart, I told you I'll make sure you stay."

"Yeah, but how? What if they do get rid of you? How can you assure my position? Maybe they'll just demote me. Morales doesn't like me very much."

"That's for sure, but don't worry; he won't touch you. I'm going no place, and neither are you."

"And how do you figure that?"

"Cause I'm too damn good at my job, and they can't afford to get rid of me."

"They'll take revenge because you opposed them."

"No way. Let them try, and I'll push them out. You don't function well while worrying. So stop! For now, let's concentrate on getting out some super magazines. You have a great eye for a quality product, so, honey, I'll be relying on you to help me produce the best magazines we ever have."

Reggie had no idea why Cristiana thought their jobs were safe. He couldn't fathom where she got her confidence. He did like the flattering remarks about his work. It was more praise than he had gotten before, and he strongly suspected there was more to it than appreciation for his hard work.

After all, she had never called him darling or sweetheart before. His worry soon turned into excitement.

His excitement reached its peak when Cristiana asked him to bring the proofs of a magazine due out that week to her apartment. She had taken a few days off and asked if he could come by sometime during the week to drop off and discuss the proofs. He had never before been to her apartment, and the idea got him little stirred up.

The magazine he was working on had to be on the news stand by the end of the week. He was sure Cristiana would be pleased if he managed to complete the proofs and bring them to her that same evening. The work took a little longer than he expected, and he didn't finish his final touches till seven that evening. He put each section in a separate folder and headed off to her place. It was close to eight by the time he reached her apartment building. The doorman announced him, and Cristiana told him to come on up. In the elevator going up he had a hard time not admitting to himself what he was expecting.

His heart was beating faster than normal when he rang the bell. Cristiana opened the door. She was wearing beautiful Japanese silk pajamas. "Hi Reggie, I wasn't expecting you till tomorrow. How nice of you to bring me the proofs so soon." Instead of inviting him in, she reached out to take the bundle of folders from him. Reggie stared at her pajama top. The top two buttons were undone exposing part of her breasts. When he glanced up from her chest he looked past her into a hallway. He saw a man holding a glass in his hands looking at them. A shock went through his body. In a split second he recognized Jorge deSantos.

Reggie dropped the folders he was still holding. Turned and ran for the elevator. Without stopping to sign out, he barged past the doorman. The doorman man tried to stop him, but was only in time to see Reggie pull out of a parking space, barely missing a passing car, and careening down the block.

Barely missing several more cars, Reggie pulled into the municipal parking structure. The garage was mostly empty, but Reggie kept racing up flights until he reached the rooftop. He drove all the way to the far end and stopped with the nose of his car against the outer wall. He got out of the car and scrambled on top of the hood. From there he stepped onto wall. Standing on the edge he paused and shouted at the top of his lungs.

"Cristiana, you bitch, I hope you rot in hell. Julia was right you're a slut." He closed his eyes and jumped.