

## **UNFAITHFUL**

“Hello. May I speak with Mrs. Paxton?”

“Speaking.”

“We have an urgent matter to discuss.”

“Who is this? Is something wrong?”

“I must speak to you in person.”

“What? At least tell me what this is about? Is someone hurt?”

“I really can’t explain it over the phone.”

“Wait. What’s going on? I’m not meeting with a perfect stranger. I’m hanging up right now... Unless you tell me what this is about...”

“I’m doing a job for your husband.”

“For my husband? I don’t understand. Why don’t you contact him? Do I need to have him call you?”

“No! It’s not like that. Mrs. Paxton, he, well, he hired me to spy on you.”

“What?”

“Mrs. Paxton, I can’t explain this over the phone. Please trust me and let’s meet, I’ll tell you everything then.”

“You’d better be for real. I mean it. Where do we meet?”

“Bookstore close to your house; the one you always go to.”

“So you do know something about me.”

“Meet me there in 45 minutes.”

Mrs. Paxton sits restlessly at the corner table, the one at which she always sits. She pauses from scratching notes into her overstuffed notebook and sips her latte, As her

pen presses into the paper again, the man shows up and sits in the chair across from her.

She examines him and shakes her head in frustration; “I am a little disappointed in you already!” She sighs and proceeds, “Now, let’s flesh out the details. Did my husband hire you to check up on me? And if that’s true, aren’t you compromising your cover by calling me at home—much less asking to meet me here?”

“I know a lot about your husband, Mrs. Paxton. He is cheating on you.”

Mrs. Paxton’s pen slips from her hand. She scoops it from the floor and taps it against the table as she asks, “Why would you spy on him instead of me? That doesn’t make sense.”

The man pleads, “Are you taking his side?”

“I’m questioning your professionalism. You’ve already made several errors. Using your cell phone to contact me—how smart is that?” She flings down her pen and gulps at her favorite drink.

With her two longest fingers, she plucks a Virginia Slim out of her purse as she realizes the Non-Smoking reality of the bookstore. She squeezes the Virginia between her fingers, “You were hired by my husband to spy on me? Well, who is the guy? Any pictures of us making passionate love? Clutching each other in the rain?” Mrs. Paxton smiles. She picks up a few pages of her writings and fans her face. “Oh, I am getting hot,”

“No, I haven’t followed you around yet.”

And she grumbles, “So you haven’t done your job yet? Then, what are you going to put in your report? You won’t make a penny working like that. I know my husband.”

“Whose side are you on? I am confused Mrs. Paxton.”

“My question exactly.”

“Are you not surprised that your husband is spying on you? He’s the one committing adultery.” Anxiously looking into her eyes waiting to see her surprised reactions.

Mrs. Paxton sighs, “What’s new?” She rolls the pen between her fingers. .

“You already know he is unfaithful and never confronted him?”

“What’s the use? First he would shamelessly deny and play dumb. And when I show him the proof, he would say it didn’t mean anything. That’s how men are. Statistically speaking, faithful men are very hardworking ones, bums and executives are not.”

“So you are Ok with that?”

She nervously taps the Virginia on the table causing her to cough up bits of tobacco, “ That’s where you come into the game. Don’t ask too many questions, you are distracting me.”

“I was hoping to make a deal with you. Your husband does not deserve a beautiful woman like--”

She interrupts, “Is that it? That’s your pitch! Your husband does not deserve a beautiful woman like you. How cliché!”

“I can do better Mrs. Paxton.”

“This is not what I had in mind. I imagined a charming and intelligent man with an ingenious plan. I hoped to be mesmerized by your wickedness and wit, I was even thinking of having an affair and maybe even killing my husband just to make it more sizzling. Oh! I had so much hope for this and then you showed up!”

She continues, “You’re not what I had in mind. You ’re not capable of accomplishing a complex scheme. Don’t you see? You are the personification of my rage, anger, despair, passion, revenge, love, cynicism and shrewdness. You just don’t qualify.”

She clutches her pen like a knife and stabs at her pages “I can’t teach you everything. Think for yourself! You are waiting for me to hold your hand and walk you through this? Oh my God. I feel like an idiot.”

She shreds her writings and flings them into the garbage can next to her table. As she gathers her purse to leave, she notices the man sitting silently across from her staring mournfully at the bits of paper, floating like dandruff in her cup.

She pauses for a second in disbelief. He turns his head, ready to inquire about further instructions. She slaps him hard and marches toward the doorway.

But before she is out the door, Mrs. Paxton turns to shoot a glance at the garbage can. Her papers are there, little ripped bandages, hanging out over the edges.

And there he is. Still sitting silently, motionless, at the table. She curses herself under her breath and considers a second slap. But she refrains, as she sees no use.

