

Prologue

Experts claim that the secret to a happy relationship isn't sex, children, money or even love. It has much more to do with the power of self-deception—a belief that your spouse is wonderful, even when evidence starts pointing to the contrary. Of course, if you happen to learn that Mr. Wonderful is making extracurricular whoopee with a woman who is, say, thinner or more successful than you, you can't pretend that your love life hasn't just splattered in your face, like a bug on a windshield. But there are trickier, more elusive marriage malignancies—such as lies of omission, financial infidelity, or a dogged refusal to change *anything*, be it a behavior, an opinion, or even a zip code. These may be easier to ignore.

The story that follows involves marriage and money, death and deception. There is also some messy business regarding an unresolved murder. It was the last decade of the twentieth century, when Big Brother wasn't watching people so closely. I was a budding private investigator and young single mother in love with an attractive criminal attorney who, it turned out, was committing a few crimes of his own. Through much of our marriage, I managed to disregard my better instincts—even as I slid into a world of pseudonyms, fake weddings, hidden bank accounts, and unexplained cash. It all made perfect sense to me at the time.

Looking back on the bizarre chain of events that changed the course of my life, I've concluded that there's no blaming my husband for what happened. He never forced me to lie or cheat or to commit ridiculous fiduciary crimes just to keep up with him. He certainly never asked me to stick my nose into the dark business of his past. Being immersed in this drama was like diving into an ice-cold lake—shocking and exciting at first, but then I became used

to it. It never occurred to me that this could be dangerous—that hypothermia could lead to incoherent, irrational behavior.

But if happiness is the goal, perhaps denial is underrated. Especially so when you are trying to hang onto something you desperately desire. Though my former life is not one I would ever choose again, I'll never regret how I let love pull me along the slippery path that eventually landed me a permanent place in this secretive family plot.