

A DEADLY PAST -
A WAKING NIGHTMARE



JUDITH
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MORE THAN YOU KNOW

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More Than You Know

The child was sitting precisely where we'd left her. Once again, I squatted down in front of her.

'I have to leave now, sweetheart. Take care.'

'You really *have* to?'

'I do, Kitty. My shift's not over. I'll check later to see how you're doing. Okay?'

She dipped her eyes. The child looked so worn and defeated, as if an inner candle had burned out.

Seeing her that way filled me with fury. The animal who did this had to be tracked and punished. He had to pay for hurting this little girl, for stealing her trust and innocence.

With the right help and support, Kitty Dolan could heal in time. But the monstrous events of this night would change her forever. The course of her life had been shifted irrevocably. She'd be forced to weather terrible storms on the choppy sea to recovery.

With gruesome clarity, I felt the child's pain. I could not mute or deny the facts. When I was close to Kitty's age, the same thing had happened to me.

Judith Kelman lives in Connecticut, USA. A mother of two, she gave up a successful career as a special education consultant and speech pathologist to begin writing full-time. *More Than You Know* is her ninth novel.

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Dana

1 At the entrance to the set, Dana Saunders hesitated. The topic of today's show gave her a rotten feeling. Pit in her stomach, racing pulse. Like the onset of a sickness she was powerless to prevent.

As she stepped in from the wings, the audience exploded in a raucous round of applause. The waiting crowd had been pre-heated by Mickey Conway, a stoop-shouldered youth in a Princeton sweatshirt. The producer, a plump daffodil blonde named Lucy Breitmeier, had set forth the rules: no gum chewing or staring at the camera. Stand when selected and speak clearly into the mike. Keep questions and comments short. On command, be wildly enthusiastic. No cursing, nose picking, or scratching of private parts, unless you cared to have those acts immortalized. No unauthorized trips out of the seat. Such were talk shows' Ten Commandments. Otherwise, anything went.

The boisterous clapping continued. The crowd was good, electric.

Dana scanned the rows of eager faces. The three rows of older women on the right were retired Ma Bell operators from Jersey City, her assistant had told her. On their left sat a church choir from Munich that was slated to perform this evening at Saint Patrick's Cathedral. This show should really get them in the mood, Dana thought grimly. From the sub-slime to the religious.

The survivors, nine women and three young girls, were planted in aisle seats along the centre section. Dana caught the frightened eye of a teenager in the fifth row and smiled warmly. The girl was morbidly obese. Three hundred pounds, minimum. Poor thing was probably trying to hide behind the fat. Hoping it might offer her a modicum of

protection. The teen dropped her self-conscious gaze and gnawed a cuticle. Catching the producer's cue, Dana turned to read the scrolling text on the teleprompter.

'Every five minutes in this country, a woman is raped. In fact, one fourth of all American girls have been sexually molested by the age of sixteen. Horrifying statistics? You bet. But numbers can't begin to describe the personal horror of this vicious, violent crime.'

'What sort of person commits such a terrible act? Why does he do it? And above all, can the rapist be cured?'

'Today on Back Talk we'll examine these and other highly controversial questions. Stay with us.'

Dana's voice was swallowed by the rising chords of the show's musical theme. *Back Talk's* logo filled the overhead monitors. Soon, it was displaced by the first thirty-second commercial in the two-minute introductory pod.

Lucy Breitmeier herded the day's principle participants toward the ring of armchairs on the elevated set. While the producer fiddled with the lapel mikes, Dana approached to greet her guests. To maintain the show's sharp edge, she always made it a point to avoid the green room. Given today's star attraction, she would have been glad to put off the meeting indefinitely.

First, Dana extended a hand to Dr Marlene Mosher, an attractive, solid-looking woman with equally solid credentials. Over the past decade, Mosher, a psychiatry professor at the Yale Medical School, had studied over a thousand confessed sex offenders. She'd concluded that the underlying obsession was incurable. Her recent book, *In Sheep's Clothing: The Myth of the Reformed Rapist*, had stirred serious dissension among mental health practitioners. It had also ignited enough public debate to propel the scholarly volume to number one on the *New York Times* best-seller list.

The avuncular-looking man on Dr Mosher's right was Patterson Graham, PhD, founder and director of the Cambridge Centre for Offender Treatment. Graham's pro-

gramme involved a pricey three-month stay at a private clinic in Greenwich, Connecticut. His clients came by court referral or voluntary commitment. His 'treatment' consisted of gourmet meals, deluxe accommodations, and daily doses of what Graham termed 'Intensive Relatedness'. From what Dana had been able to learn, Intensive Relatedness boiled down to the grown-up rapists' version of a naughty boy sitting in a corner, pondering his sins.

Somehow, Graham, whose doctorate was in botany, had managed to peddle his snake oil to a startling number of otherwise prudent people. His programme, in operation for nearly thirty years, claimed a ninety-five per cent success rate, though rapists were the most likely of all criminals to repeat violent illegal acts. In the supposed interest of client confidentiality, Patterson Graham's Cambridge programme refused to open its records to public scrutiny, so the lofty success percentage could neither be independently corroborated nor disproved. Instead, Graham promised to publish his own data, although to date, no book had appeared.

Patterson Graham had been packaged with an eye to boosting his credibility. He sported a cozy grey cardigan, mildly dishevelled white hair, and the bemused expression of a proud new grandpa peering through the nursery window. His robust outdoorsy look was courtesy of a tanned makeup base and liberal sprinklings of a ruddy blusher. The artifice wouldn't show on camera. But Dana would do her best to expose the rest of the man's phoney face.

She nodded at Graham brusquely and moved on. Next was the main event's attorney. Valerie Eckhard was unaffectionately known as 'Blowhard' by the *Back Talk* staff. A brash, abrasive redhead, Eckhard had appeared on the show several times, ardently espousing a variety of incompatible causes. Last time, the attorney played the super-feminist, outraged by private clubs and colleges that

refused to admit women. Today, she was fronting for the monster on her right.

Finally, Dana forced herself to turn to the lowlife creep himself. The rapist's image had been altered by a curly brown wig, mirrored sunglasses, and ponderous makeup. The nose was a bulbous blob. Circles of bright rouge plumped the cheeks. Pancake narrowed the lips, and thick, grey pencil made his eyebrows resemble lengths of dirty rope. But despite the clown mask, Dana found him chilling.

Valerie Eckhard had set firm conditions for her client's appearance. The lawyer would not reveal the man's name, not even to Dana or *Back Talk's* in-house legal counsel. Mr X would sign the necessary release form, but only if Blowhard could witness the signature herself and retain the form in her office safe. The camouflage makeup must be applied before he arrived.

On air, he'd be referred to as John. Dana could ask no questions that might hint at his identity. Nothing about his place of residence, his job or educational history, or his family status. The audience would be so instructed and reminded of this requirement whenever necessary.

The terms Valerie Eckhard demanded were vexing and unconventional. Dana hated flying blind. But her staff had embraced the idea and pressed her to proceed with it. Sexual assault was a hot issue. Many competing shows had featured known rapists safely ensconced in jail cells and others who'd supposedly been rehabilitated after serving their terms.

Presenting a confessed molester who'd never been apprehended, her staff reminded Dana, added a fresh, titillating twist. This nameless, masked creature functioned as part of some unsuspecting community. Viewers would not be able to escape the sinister implications. Any man could be a rapist: the helpful next-door neighbour, the trusted family physician, the kindly old pastor of the local church, any husband or father or brother or son.

Extra promotion had generated a large anticipatory buzz

for the programme, which would air at the end of next week. Record ratings were expected. The show's lawyer had voiced no serious objections. With mere moments to air time, Dana saw no choice but to ignore the strident warning voice in her head.

'Good morning, John,' she said stiffly. 'Thank you for agreeing to do the show.'

'My pleasure, Ms Saunders.' He spoke with a hiss that made her skin prickle. The makeup gave him a waxen, grotesque look. 'Glad to be here.'

Dana caught a double dose of her own uneasy expression in the gleaming mirrored lenses of his sunglasses. Frown lines pinched her forehead. Her smile had the stiff, faded look of a pressed corsage. Worry dulled her large brown eyes. Turning away, she was grateful for the producer's next cue.

'We're on in ten seconds. *Places*, everyone. In five . . . four . . .' Lucy mouthed the final beats of the countdown. She held out three plump fingers. Two. One. The camera's light blinked red. Once again *Back Talk's* white-on-blue logo filled the overhead monitors. The show's theme played over another burst of thunderous applause. Dana's next block of text flashed on the teleprompter. She stepped forward, eyes on the camera, and said:

'Can a rapist ever *really* be cured? That is the question. To help us try to answer it today, we've invited a fascinating panel of experts. Please help me welcome them now.'

Dana tried to keep her introductions of the four guests even-handed. But the audience warmed at once to Dr Mosher. The applause for Patterson Graham and Attorney Blowhard was tepid. John the rapist drew a din of horrified murmurs and a smattering of boos.

Dana raised her palms for reason. 'Okay, okay. John came here today to admit his crime and express his remorse. I think we should hear him out.'

She turned toward the camouflaged face. 'Twenty-five years ago, you raped a twelve-year-old girl, John. You were

never arrested for the crime. In fact you were never punished in any way. And yet, after attending Mr Graham's Cambridge programme shortly after the assault, you're convinced you would never, under any circumstances, rape again. Is that correct?

Valerie Eckhard bristled, 'John isn't on trial here, Dana. There's no need to badger him.'

'I'm just trying to make things clear, Ms Eckhard. Why don't you let John speak for himself?'

Blowhard was about to blow again, but John pre-empted her. Dipping his bewigged head and spreading his hands in a priestly gesture, he said, 'That's exactly what I'm here to do, Ms Saunders. I'm sorrier than you can imagine for what I did to that little girl all those years ago. I'd give anything – *anything* – if I could take back that one terrible night.'

His tone was shallow and insincere. Dana felt a surge of fury. 'I'm sure our viewers would like to know why you did it,' she said.

'I was strung out. Totally screwed up. When I saw that girl, something just snapped inside me.' John shook his head as if trying to shake the ugly memory.

A horrific image formed in Dana's mind. Vividly, she saw this beast stalking her own precious child. A spark of rage ignited in her gut. The man deserved to die. Her fingers cramped with the sudden urge to squeeze the life out of him.

Drawing a breath, Dana forced herself back in control. She even managed to prod a snip of sympathy into her tone. Her job was to keep the show's fire stoked, not to charbroil the participants. 'John, I can hear that you're sorry. I'm sure everyone can. But how can we be absolutely sure you could never slip into that strung-out, crazy state again? How can *you* be sure?'

Dr Mosher smoothly took the ball. 'Exactly on target, Dana. My study clearly demonstrated that sex offenders are compulsive personalities. They are driven by circum-

stance. Even after years without incident, the rapist might be set off by whatever triggered his prior attacks.'

'Such as?' Dana prompted.

'For one man, it may be watching a pornographic movie. For another, it's getting drunk. The most trivial things can cause a relapse. I've had patients who said they were moved to rape by a fight with the wife or a bad day at the office.'

Dana frowned. 'You're talking normal stresses, Doctor. The kind all of us face every day.'

'Precisely. Which is why we can never be a hundred per cent certain that an offender won't repeat his crime,' Mosher said firmly.

'Nonsense!' Patterson Graham bellowed his objection. 'With all due respect, Dr Mosher. It's obvious that the offenders you sampled lacked the benefits of a proven treatment programme such as the one we offer at Cambridge. My clients benefit from intensive work, expert counselling, and long-term follow-up support.'

'Then, why won't you allow outside investigators to confirm your results?' Dana asked.

'Because I refuse to compromise my work, that's why. Having outsiders poking around would be an intolerable disruption. Instead, I've laid it all out in my book, *The Road To Redemption*, which will be out next May. Our success rate is over ninety-five per cent.'

'But those remain *unconfirmed* numbers,' Dana persisted.

'I have confirmed them, personally. Besides, our success speaks for itself.'

Dr Mosher consulted the computer printout in her lap. 'As it happens, Dr Graham, sixty-seven of my subjects were former Cambridge clients. Of those, twenty-two admitted to repeat offences, fifteen reported near-misses, and seventeen of the remaining thirty detailed disturbing, recurrent fantasies regarding sexual abuse, the majority involving children.'

The audience stirred uneasily.

Graham chuckled, even as blotches of fury mottled his neck. He turned to Dana. 'You know what they say. There are lies, damned lies, and statistics.'

'Then, how do you explain Dr Mosher's findings, Mr Graham?'

'I don't *have* to explain them. *She* does. And, by the way, it's *Doctor* Graham.'

Dana bit back a smile of her own. 'Really? What exactly is your medical speciality, *Doctor*?'

Graham had that lovely trapped look that played so well on freeze-frame at a cut to commercial. 'I'm a PhD, not a physician.'

'I see. So you're a psychologist?'

The quack smoothed his cardigan and muttered an unintelligible reply. Reluctantly, Dana allowed him to slip the hook. It was way too early in the show to reel the fool in and leave him flapping. No doubt the audience would take care of that, and him, in the question-and-answer segment.

'The Cambridge Programme works,' John interjected. 'I sit here as proof of that. They taught me to view things from the victim's perspective. That makes all the difference.'

Dana forced herself to face his hidden eyes. 'Are you saying you've never had a disturbing dream or fantasy since participating in the programme, John? Never a single instant when you feared you might lose control again?'

John the rapist hesitated for precisely the beat Dana wanted. Before he recovered enough to respond, she flashed her signature best-friend smile at the camera.

'Stay right where you are, folks. *Back Talk* will return after these messages ...'

During the break, Dana slipped backstage. There, she submitted to a swipe of fresh makeup and some predictable banter from her staff.

'You know when you mentioned that a woman in this country gets raped every five minutes, boss? Bet you any-

thing some bozo in the audience asks how come the guy doesn't get tired,' Mickey Conway said.

'Don't you dare even think of using that one in tomorrow's warm-up, Mickey,' Dana warned.

Conway smiled meekly. Tasteless was his speciality. 'Are you sure? I bet it'd get them going.'

'You would be the one going,' Dana replied crisply. 'You read me?'

Crooked teeth and a dense crop of stubborn sandy hair gave Conway the look of an overaged Dennis the Menace. 'Loud and clear. The PC police have spoken.' He clicked his heels and saluted.

'Don't start with me, Mickey. Political correctness has nothing to do with it. There's nothing funny about sexual violence. People get hurt.'

'Yes, boss. Whatever you say, boss.' Rolling his eyes, Mickey loped off toward the projection room.

Dana watched him go. Conway was a computer whiz and a crack researcher. His services in those areas were indispensable to her show. They also brought him frequent appealing offers from the corporate sector. Mickey only stayed on at *Back Talk* because he adored playing stand-up comic for the fifteen minutes before each show began. Dana recognized the necessity of keeping him happy, but she could have done nicely without Mickey's dubious notion of humour.

'That John character gives me a major case of the geeks.' Julie Westerman was the show's greenest production assistant. Jules, as she preferred to be called, was bright, eager, and impeccably organized. Promising, Dana thought. But the pretty young strawberry blonde needed toning down. Her voice was too shrill, her gait too brisk and bouncy. At times, Jules's explosive enthusiasms reminded Dana of a puppy in dire need of obedience school.

But Dana more than shared the assistant's revulsion for today's star guest. 'Hard to feel otherwise when you consider he raped a twelve-year-old,' she told Jules grimly.

The others lapsed into an awkward silence. It was no secret among the crew that Dana's off-camera universe revolved around her twelve-year-old daughter, Rebecca. Becky was a terrific kid, upbeat, funny, remarkably unaffected by her formidable intelligence and prodigious talent for the violin.

The child also seemed entirely untouched by her mother's national celebrity. Dana fought hard to maintain her daughter's distance from the seamier side of fame. Becky went by her father's last name. At school and other functions, Dana too hid behind her ex-husband's surname and wore a hat and glasses that hid her identity. Dana well knew the risk of stalkers and other crazies. A frightening number of people were drawn to or delusional about public figures.

One highly uncavoury character, a man named Lester Yurie, had been haunting Dana for years. Yurie was a seasoned criminal and Dana's self-appointed most ardent fan. On regular occasions, when he managed to breach Dana's security, the creep eagerly volunteered his services. 'You need anything ripped off, Dana? Anyone taken care of? Give me a holler and I'll see to it. Be my pleasure. Make that my *privilege*.'

Loyal staffers understood the need to protect Dana and Becky from characters like Lester Yurie. They cooperated in the information blockade, refusing to yield to frequent juicy bribes from the tabloids for tidbits about Dana and her family.

'Thirty seconds!' Lucy called.

'Okay, people. Let's get to it,' Dana said.

'In five...' Lucy counted down as the camera lights flashed on the seated guests. Turning to the audience, Dana read the segment lead.

'Can the rapist be cured? That's the question before us today. Our expert panel includes a confessed child molester.'

A close-up of John's gargoyle face loomed on the monitor. He was caught in a satisfied smirk.

Approaching, Dana said coldly, 'Is there something you find amusing here, John?'

The rapist shifted in his seat. 'Of course not. I was just -'

'You say you learned to see things from your victim's perspective. Is that correct?'

'Victim empathy, Dr Graham calls it,' John said eagerly.

'Do you honestly believe you can understand what rape does to a little girl? Do you honestly expect *us* to believe that?'

'Anyone can make a mistake, lady. I'm not a bad person.'

The audience responded with boos and catcalls.

Dana silenced them with a hand and faced John squarely. 'A mistake? Is that what you call raping an innocent child?'

The crowd was riveted. They watched Dana with the fascination of watching a snake handler manipulating a cobra.

'Well, John. I'd say you still have a few things left to learn.'

The show ended with the audience on its feet. The applause was deafening.

As the crew stored cameras and equipment and the audience filtered out, Lucy herded the principal guests offstage. Dana followed to offer thanks and farewells. As she spoke to Dr Mosher, she felt a prickle of unease. The rapist had removed his mirrored glasses. John's eyes were hard black beads. They fixed on her, unblinking, hot with anger.

Dana shuddered. Anxious to be rid of him, she quickly moved from Mosher to Graham to Eckhard. She couldn't bring herself to meet the rapist's disquieting stare. As she cast a dismissive nod in his direction, Jules Westerman came bounding in from the control room.

'Guess what just came over the wire? Becky won the Lassiter Prize! Congratulations, Dana! Can you believe your daughter got an honour like that? I bet -'

Dana's fierce look silenced the young woman at once. But the damaging words were out. Quickly, Dana turned to catch the rapist's response. The bastard's lips twitched. Was that a glint of amusement in his eyes?

Dana's fists clenched. The Lassiter Prize was big news, awarded annually to a violin prodigy. Stories about Becky winning the distinction were sure to run in the national press. Some of the pieces would reveal where the child went to school or other telling information. A confessed pederast now had the means to track her baby down.

There had to be some way to stop this, to back time up and reclaim those few lethal words. Maybe the creep hadn't heard what Jules said. Or maybe he'd failed to catch its significance . . .

'Good show today,' Lucy Breitmeier said to break the awkward silence. 'Thanks, everybody.'

The others said goodbye. Blowhard Eckhard's parting nod was crisp and angry. John dawdled a step behind. Pinning Dana with his disgusting eyes, he proffered a hand.

Ignoring the hand, Dana tried to peer behind his hard, impenetrable gaze.

'Thank you for having me, Ms Saunders. A pleasure, *really*.' Following his attorney, the rapist turned and headed out the door.