THE WHOLE TRUTH

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THE WHOLE TRUTH

BOOKS BY NANCY PICKARD

Generous Death
Say No to Murder
No Body
Marriage Is Murder
Dead Crazy
Bum Steer
I.O.U.
But I Wouldn't Want to Die There
Confession
Twilight
The Whole Truth

For my son, Nick

1
Raymond

The courthouse in downtown Bahia Beach, Florida, seems a pale, cool place to hold the evidence of so much passion. Divorces. Rape. Murders. Arson. Assault. Abuse of all kinds, by all sorts of people, upon all sorts of people. Daily, it parades past these bland, blond walls of the Howard County Courthouse, in Florida's Twenty-first Judicial Circuit. This is a place of stark contrasts and painful paradoxes, of quiet ironies and violent surprises. Outside the long narrow windows of the courthouse, the south Florida sun burns hot enough to scorch a tourist's skin, but inside, it's all shade and air-conditioning.

My fingertips feel dipped in ice water as I write these words.

They seem to promise a surprise or shock of some kind, although nobody in this courtroom is expecting one. We're expecting the jury to deliver a guilty verdict today, and we're all expecting to troop back in here in a couple of weeks to hear this same jury recommend the death penalty.

And yet, my own words seem to foreshadow something else.

Strange, but I don't have any idea of what that could be.

For the ten days of the trial of Raymond Raintree for the kidnapping and murder of Natalie Mae McCullen, I have scribbled notes with stiff, cold fingers. Now, as we await the verdict, I press

my fingers into my palms to warm them, before moving my pen again. I'm not using a laptop because the soft tapping of fingers on keyboards drives the judge crazy, and so she has forbidden computers.

Judge Edyth Flasschoen's courtroom—number three, second floor—is especially chilly, because she keeps the thermostat turned down exceptionally low. It's so cold in here I can smell the air-conditioning, a metallic aroma that gets up in my nose and stays there until I overpower it with garlic for lunch from one of the restaurants down on Bahia Boulevard. The judge takes good care of her jurors, though: no air-conditioning blows directly on them.

High on her bench, seated in her brown leather chair on rollers, the judge taps her microphone with a pink fingernail. She's a tough old broad, sixty-two years old, with a beauty-shop hairdo and the metabolism of a Florida mosquito. When I interviewed her for the true crime book I'm writing about this case, she said, "It's always too damned hot to suit me. I could go naked under my robes, and I'd still sweat like a pig in the brush."

"Get this show going," she commands her bailiff now.

Along with other spectators, I am seated on the back row behind the prosecutor's table. Picking which side to sit on each day has felt like choosing sides of the aisle at a wedding where nobody wants to sit behind the groom. The benches behind the defendant are full, but the people seated there look uncomfortable to me. Nobody wants to be mistaken for being sympathetic to Ray Raintree.

Judge Flasschoen is glaring at the defense team.

"I'm warning you in the audience and you attorneys up front, there will be no outcry over this verdict, whatever it is. You understand me?" Leanne English, the lead defense counsel, is getting the brunt of this lecture, which doesn't seem quite fair given that she hasn't done much to prevent the flow of justice toward conviction. If the only obligation of a defense team is to force the prosecution to prove the charges, then Leanne has succeeded admirably. Nevertheless, the judge is wagging a manicured finger at her. "Con-

tempt of court is no empty phrase in my court. You want your own trial? You want to experience what it's like to be a defendant? We can arrange that, for anybody who doesn't sit still and keep quiet."

Leanne, a trim little redhead in a crisp black suit, nods.

The jury hasn't liked her, but they've loved the state's attorney, Franklin DeWeese. He is a tall, handsome black man with an ingratiating manner and a name that oozes political promise. The prosecutor has performed superbly in this trial. He focused the jury's attention on the evidence that pins the defendant to the crime, and he distracted them from the two troubling questions that remain unanswered: No motive has ever been established, and nobody knows who the defendant really is.

Ray Raintree is a man without an identity.

In a country in which most people worry about how easily the facts of their lives can be accessed by strangers, Ray seems to have spontaneously generated out of thin air. Computerized criminal records haven't identified him, nor have fingerprint matching or DNA testing, either. He has no past that anybody, including me, has been able to find. This is not good news for a true crime writer with a book due on her editor's desk in two weeks.

In his closing arguments, Franklin emphasized, "It doesn't matter who Ray was or where he came from prior to the murder of Natalie Mae. It doesn't matter who Ray said he was after he killed her. The only thing that matters is where he was and what he was doing at the moment she died. At that moment, he could have been president of the United States in a former life, and it wouldn't matter. He could have turned into a Nobel Prize winner the next day, and it wouldn't matter. Ray can call himself anything he wants to, but if he is the one who murdered that child—and he is—we are all of us going to call him a killer. That's who he is. Ms. English will try to convince you that you need to know his motive for killing her, but I promise you the law does not require you to know why he did it. You only need to know *that* he did it. And you do know that, because we have proved it beyond any reason-

able doubt. He kidnapped that child, he killed her, and he mutilated her body. That's all you need to know, in order to convict him."

He convinced me, and probably the jury, too.

But that's not going to fill the middle of my book with facts, and it makes me feel uneasy to think that my home state may execute a man with no identity. I don't know exactly why this should worry me—beyond my personal concern about my book—but it does.

The jury foreman is rising to his feet, with a paper in his hands.

On this day of the verdict, the foreman is wearing a light blue suit, white shirt, navy blue tie. He has red cheeks, slicked back hair, and he looks like he just drove into the big city from a farm. He looks somber, nervous, aware of the importance of his role and this moment. The other jurors are looking at him, as if they're afraid to look at anybody else for fear of giving their decision away, as if we don't all know what it's going to be.

I've attended a lot of trials, and I've seen a lot of jurors, and they almost all look scared and sincere at moments like this. Having served on a jury myself, I know just how they feel. Ray's on his feet now, along with Leanne and her team. Franklin and his assistants have stood up, too. There's a feeling in the room that we're all holding our breath, even though the verdict is predictable.

My own heart is beating faster than I would have expected it to.

"Members of the jury, have you reached your verdict?"

"Your Honor, we have," the foreman tells her in a strong, carrying voice. After a few phrases of official language, he finally says it: "We the jury find the defendant guilty as charged in indictment number six-seven-two. So say we all."

I'm surprised how deeply relieved I feel to hear it.

So much for my foreshadowing of a shock or surprise: This is exactly how this trial was supposed to turn out, and now it has, and I can write the final chapter.

Obediently, we maintain decorum in the courtroom.

And then we jump in our seats at a sudden, single loud noise.

Natty's father, Tony McCullen, has just slammed his beefy ex-boxer's hand down on the wooden railing which separates him from the state's attorneys in front of him. All by itself, that hand says it for all the rest of us: *Yes!*

My heart aches for Tony and for his wife, Susan. This verdict may be a necessary step in their healing, but it is also such small, small recompense for the loss of their sweet little girl.

Ray, himself, hasn't moved a hair since the verdict was read.

Leanne has put her left arm around him and is whispering something into his right ear. Franklin DeWeese has turned in an equally quiet manner to shake hands with his assistants, and now he's embracing Tony McCullen. The victim's mother, Susan, was a witness, testifying to Natty's whereabouts before the murder, so she has spent the other days of the trial seated on a bench outside this courtroom, surrounded by comforting friends and members of her family. Susan could have come in for this verdict, but when I saw her outside today, she told me she didn't want to be here for it.

"I want to watch him die," she told me, looking thin and haunted.

She doesn't want to have to see him at all before that final day.

After the verdict, the members of the jury—

The members of the jury are staring at Ray Raintree with odd expressions on their faces. What's going on up there? What's he done now? Jurors number six and seven glance at each other. Juror number one in the front row frowns. The juror to his left looks downright sick. Some of the other jurors are turning their faces away, as if they want to look anywhere except at Ray.

The judge doesn't seem to have noticed anything out of the ordinary. She's up there on her bench, gathering papers in preparation for setting a date for the sentencing hearing.

But something's up with the jury, even now.

I think I'll stand up as discreetly as possible, pretend I'm just stretching my legs, and see if I can detect what's happening up there. I have sympathized with the jury all through the trial, and

not least because they had to face Raymond Raintree every day for ten days. From personal experience, I know he's hard to look at. Anybody who has ever stared into his creepy eyes hates the fact that his was the last face that child ever saw.

I see that Leanne English is about to say something to Franklin.

Oh, my god! Ray has just shoved her violently, propelling her across the aisle toward the prosecutor. Franklin yells, "Ow!" as she falls against him. Leanne screams, and she's clutching at Franklin's arms. He attempts to grab her, but she slips from his hands, and falls to the floor.

She's screaming again, and so are some other people.

The courtroom is erupting into pandemonium!

Ray has pushed his attorney out of the way, leapt across her legs, and he's charging toward Judge Flasschoen's bench.

"Kill me!" he's yelling at her. "Kill me now! Do it! Kill me now!"

Judge Flasschoen stands up. With her right hand, she reaches into the long black sleeve that drapes her left arm, and she pulls out a small pistol.

She takes aim, and shoots Ray.

Ray charges forward a few more steps before falling.

Oh, my god, a judge just shot a defendant!

I hear my own voice shouting, along with a dozen others, "Is he dead? Did she kill him?"

The Little Mermaid

By Marie Lightfoot

CHAPTER ONE

South Florida is laced with saltwater canals, all leading inevitably to the great Intracoastal Canal, which runs from Texas to Boston and which connects with the Atlantic Ocean. In Bahia Beach, alone, there is enough access to water to make the parents of children feel nervous all of the time. It's so frighteningly easy for a baby to wander only a few yards out of sight, and in the space of a telephone call, to tumble into the water. In Bahia Beach, there are 327 canals, most of them lined on both sides with residences. Many, many of those homes have children living in them, children who are warned from the time they can crawl, "Don't go near the water!"

Driving in the city is a matter of crossing many bridges, some of them drawbridges that open to allow larger vessels to pass, holding up long lines of traffic as they go.

But the majority of Bahia's bridges are small, pretty ones spanning narrow canals and made of concrete. An interesting way to see those bridges is to float under them in a small boat. Kids especially love that, unless it spooks them too much. Underneath a bridge it's a different

world—a dank, shadowy cave where you can see barnacles on the bottom, and you can smell fish and salt water. But you have to wait for the tide to be low enough to do that, or you won't get under at all because the water that flows in and out daily from the Atlantic will be licking the underside of the bridge. As the tide retreats, the boaters who use the canals for fun and transportation can slide under by laying themselves flat in their little boats as the undersides of the bridges pass inches from their nose. But eventually the water level decreases enough to allow even a man as tall as six-foot-seven-inch Bradley Williams to pass under without ducking his head.

On the morning of June sixteenth Brad, fifty-seven years old and still sporting a thick crop of sandy hair, sat at the stern of his beloved seventeen-foot solid teak motorboat, *Carousel.* His wife, Jeannie, sixty-one and healthily attractive from all the tennis she plays, sat facing forward in front of him. She was knitting a vest for a grandchild as she and Brad leisurely puttered along on the reliable strength of *Carousel*'s eleven horsepower diesel engine. The little boat is a family heirloom that Brad himself meticulously maintains and which everybody on both sides of the family loves like a pet. Like an untiring pony, it carries them nearly everywhere, to Bahia Beach's boat-accessible parks and picnic areas, to the homes of friends who live on the water, even out into the ocean where it bobs like a cheerful, unsinkable brown seal.

This particular Tuesday morning, Jeannie and Bradley were motoring over to Brad's aged parents' residence on a nearby canal. The elder Williamses prefer to live in their native Maine in summertime, leaving their son and daughter-in-law to look out for their property. Checking on it every day gives Brad and Jean a nice excuse to hop into *Carousel* and enjoy an early morning cruise.

Above them, the busy streets of Bahia Beach, a city of

100,000 people, hummed with rush hour traffic. But down on the water, all was serene. Their little motor is a thoughtfully quiet one, so they can putter past backyards and barely disturb the peace of the upper-middle-class neighborhood where they and Brad's parents live.

To reach Brad's parents' place, they have to go under three bridges. At the first one, connecting Sunrise and Fourteenth Streets above them, Jeannie was so busy knitting and purling (to rush the wee vest into service for a Sunday christening) that Brad had to remind her to duck her head.

The tide wasn't out very far yet. The Williams bent way over to get under, but they were used to this. After more than thirty years of living near the water, they duck under bridges as casually as other people duck under tree limbs. Besides, Brad is so tall he jokes that he's spent most of his life ducking one thing or another.

So they took the first bridge easily. Jeannie never dropped a stitch. The vest she was making was all white, in honor of the occasion. The yarn was so delicate she worried that her fingers—roughened from years of sanding the teak on their boats—would catch the fibers and pull them out of line.

Even with her rush-job knitting, Jeannie didn't ignore the beauty all around them. Perfect green lawns tilting down to boat docks and to well-maintained stone and cement seawalls. Lovely homes. Royal palm trees. The chattering of wild parakeets. Yards boasting their own orange, avocado, or grapefruit trees, most of them sagging with their heavy harvest at this time of year. Several great-beaked pelicans perching on dock posts. Gulls swooping over tall masts. And a clear, sunny Florida sky overhead. It seemed a perfect morning, like almost every one to which lucky south Floridians awoke each day. Granted, the temperature was already ninety degrees at seven o'clock in the morning, but down on the water, it was pleasant.

Jeannie never tired of such days.

Bradley never took their good fortune for granted.

Mornings like this, they felt especially blessed, and they told each other so. Married twenty-five years. Three wonderful daughters. And now a first grandchild, a chubby blond darling named Melanie. Brad was already making her a "big-girl bed" shaped like a boat. When finished, it would rock with a gentle motion, just as if she were sailing on the sea.

The second bridge on their route was easy to navigate, too.

Duck. Under. Through to the other side.

Visitors to the Williams love these excursions in *Carousel,* even though it scares landlubbers to pass into the shadows below the street. It's a thrill, especially when they have to duck down really low, so low they're afraid they'll scrape their backs or knock themselves out on the concrete trusses. The Williams haven't lost any tourists yet.

Now, Jeannie and Brad saw the third and last bridge coming up. Beyond it, they glimpsed his parents' house.

"Hasn't burned down," Brad joked to Jeannie, in his laconic Maine accent, still pronounced even though he hasn't lived there since he was twenty.

"Somebody left their fishing pole," Jeannie remarked, traces of her Boston upbringing still as clear in her words as Maine is in his. "Looks like the cops caught him, too."

Sure enough, as they neared the third bridge, they saw a fishing pole lodged firmly between two of the concrete posts on the upper side of the little bridge. Fishing there was illegal, the Williams knew, but people did it anyway. There is amazing affluence in Bahia, as there is in Pompano to the north and Fort Lauderdale to the south, but the homeless flock there, too, and people have to eat. Personally, Jeannie wouldn't want to eat anything a person could catch from these canals. Maybe she's being persnick-

ety, she says, but she never can help thinking of all those big boats on the Intracoastal and all of the pollution they surely must leave behind them, regulations or no. Not to mention industrial effluents. No, what is in these canals can stay there, in Jeannie's view. If she ever goes hungry, God forbid, she'd rather line up for soup at a shelter than to fish off these bridges.

As they slowly floated closer, they saw that the fiberglass pole was rigidly bowed and the line was very taut.

"Caught themselves an old inner tube," was Jeannie's guess.

"That dates you," Brad teased her. "Don't you know that tires don't even have inner tubes anymore?"

"I said it was an old one, didn't I?"

Bradley observed to himself that it looked like a substantial rig, like something his own fishing nut son-in-law might use to land a big, heavy swordfish, and not like a cheap old pole a tramp might use to snare a passing crab, or little sole. You wouldn't think anybody would want to go off and leave it there. Even if it was snagged on something under the bridge, they could have cut the line and saved the pole.

He throttled back to slow down the boat even more.

Now they could see that an officer in the brown and tan uniform of the Bahia Beach Police Department was peering over the side of the bridge. He had on a short-sleeved shirt, and they could see the sun glint off the badge above his heart. Sunglasses dangled from his left hand. He looked at where the taut line disappeared into the dark water beneath the bridge, and then he looked at them in their boat. He yelled out to them, "Can you see what's caught on the line down there?"

As Bradley eased *Carousel* as close as he could without running into the line, Jeannie slid over to starboard to try to get a look. At first, she couldn't detect anything, because