

L A R A C R A I G

A LOVE STORY

A humane, complex novel about trauma,
justice, and domestic life.



**ACCIDENTS
OF
TRUTH**

Accidents of Truth
By Lara Craig

This is a work of fiction.
Any similarity to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events, is purely
coincidental.

©Lara Craig, All Rights Reserved.

Accidents of Truth

“What I have been listening to in court is not my life, it is the shape and shadow of my life with the accidents of truth taken out of it.”

Quote from Ross Hunter's *The Chalk Garden*

Screenplay by John Michael Hayes

Preface

I was watching a movie about a writer and the editor rejected her story telling the main character to write as if no one's going to read it. Not your mother, not your friends, not your family, not your lover. Write what you truly feel when you are all alone.

Now, that's a story.

Or words to that effect.

I immediately sat down and rewrote my book.

With this reflection, I realize that I have earned the right to let people know rape is not an off-page event whispered about in the shadows, it's a nightmare replayed every day in the victim's mind. It is never quiet. It has a right to be cast into the sunlight.

I know what you're thinking now.

But I have been raped.

By a person who vowed to protect me.

I have earned this right.

Prologue

It was the early 70s, a time of relief from the Vietnam War that had ravaged us and a time to turn our backs on the loss of innocence that was the 60s. We were a generation no longer prepared to wallow in the mud at a massive music festival, loving the one we were with. We were committed to one lover, basking in the summer sun, listening to whimsical rock like “Spill the Wine.”

For those of us on the brink of leaving high school to enter the world of reality, we had cut our teeth on grade school nuclear attack drills, learning to take shelter for an event that couldn't be prepared for. We were a blend of living for today, and yearning for a tomorrow.

I was one of the first to take the plunge. I was on my own, for what it was. I shared the upstairs of an old house in a derelict part of the city with Sarah, the ex-girlfriend of the best friend of my ex-boyfriend. Living in this remote island in the middle of the city far away from the normalcy of the suburbs, we weren't so much castaways, as we were cast-offs.

Sarah and I shared exactly two rooms, plus a toilet in a closet under the stairs to the remaining fourth floor attic. We had quickly become accustomed to lobbying our bodies in the right configuration to avoid bumping our heads on the slanted ceiling when in use. A shared bathroom on the second floor provided us with a bathtub/shower combination, only requiring a little planning to call ahead to the couple renting the apartment to let you in. With our youth and innocence, neither Sarah nor I noticed this as an inconvenience.

Our domain was the third floor, graciously furnished with one lopsided easy chair we retrieved from the garbage on the street, a wooden orange crate as a side table, a black rotary phone and the most fabulous huge window that captured the gentle breezes that worked their way through the leaves of the large tree outside. It was a magical window, where you could spend hours, watching the leaves rustle and listening to the far away sound of the downtown traffic.

The second room hosted a single bed, a rug in the middle of the floor, and a series of cardboard boxes we used a dresser and closet for the modest remains of our wardrobe. Like an ongoing slumber party Sarah and I took turns rotating who would sleep on the bed and who would sleep on the rug each night.

For what it was worth, a small archaic refrigerator in the main room still had the capacity to lock small children inside sat to one side. This feature was of no consequence other than as a statement to how very old it was. Like Rosie the robot on *The Jetsons*, our little fridge had an entire rhapsody of mechanical noises that provided a background drone to our otherwise lifeless apartment. Beside the fridge was a small counter hosting a hotplate, completing our little kitchen area.

Sarah and I were the first to leave high school and exert our independence - chase the feminist dream of young, single, professionals living downtown. Sarah left school early because she had just had a four year relationship end at the hands (literally) of her best friend and could no longer bear school life, me, I had left...because I was bored.

Together we formed a Mutt and Jeff that sounded far more desirable than the reality. Low paying white collar jobs promising the moon and delivered nothing, we barely subsisted and spent most of our non-working time listening to our stomach's rumble on empty to the sounds of an ancient transistor radio that formed our only source of entertainment.

Not surprising, I had fled for an evening away from the oppression of our tiny apartment and gone back to the burbs to catch up to my old life. I knew Sarah both wouldn't enjoy it and couldn't help but make sure everyone else didn't enjoy it either, so I had taken the subway and bus by myself, leaving her to find her own way through an evening of reading and pondering. I also hadn't invited her to come with me.

Roommates are a funny thing. You start out as friends, it's the reason you selected each other as roommates, but you quickly move past that to being more like family, spending time together when you have nothing better to do.

Intentionally or not, I enjoyed myself with the old gang. I had fun. I felt guilty about leaving Sarah alone in that apartment, but it was refreshing to be with people that had no other worry or obligation but to have everything provided for them by their respective parents. It was well, light. I made no real effort to get back to the apartment except to wait until the decision would be made for me; the subway and buses had stopped running.

With a feeling of unease that I passed off as the lingering guilt that I was having fun and she wasn't, I phoned Sarah.

"Hi," she greeted the call with, "Where are you?"

"I'm at the old neighborhood," I replied, working on an indignant tone.

"What on earth are you doing there? Why didn't you tell me?" and she droned on and on. The end result was she had watched our short, foul-breathed, Portuguese landlord sit on the front stoop below our window and swill back enough beer to choke a horse or at least make him pee like a racing one.

His odor, real or imagined, was like a noxious green vapor that slowly rose from the stoop and hung outside our magical window, blocking anything fresh. He was also a lurker. You know, one of those people that you never know when they arrive, you turn a corner quickly and you crash into them. You never catch them watching but you feel their eyes. They stand too close, they stare at you,

or your breasts, through bleary eyes. In short, a lurker. The subways were filled with them.

My conscience was now in full gear so I began to make arrangements to find my way back. The silly thing was that I had to wait three more hours until the subway and buses were running again, or, begin walking and I would still arrive at the same time as if I had waited the three hours. I waited.

Jumping from the subway train to the platform, my feet barely touching the ground, I sped walked down the two streets that led to the apartment, fueled by the guilt that I hadn't just been honest with Sarah and told her before I left. Past the front stoop, down the overgrown path that once was a driveway, I hit the backyard entrance and bounded up the three flights of narrow, worn steps to our apartment.

The first warning was that the door was ajar. It was always closed, locked and bolted, even when we were both home. For all the energy I had summoned to propel me from the subway to here, I was stopped cold, instantaneously glued to the spot.

At a moment like this every sensory in your body goes on overtime. The chirping of the summertime birds is replaced by the blood rushing through your ears and the beating of your heart. Everything tingles, you break into a sweat, your eyes strain to see into the shadows that lay beyond the door, everything intensifies and time takes on a different rhythm, both slow and fast.

Pushing open the door, I remained in one spot, ready to fight or take flight. The creak of the door as it opened occupied every space of sound, eyes adjusting to the dim light, I walked in, tentatively.

I was in the hallway, a long narrow passage that led to the kitchen/living room, a narrow door on my right for the toilet-under-the-stairs, and a second narrow doorway on my left that led to the bedroom/walk-in closet/storage area.

From this vantage I could look straight through to the window and see the

material we used as drapes floating on the early morning breeze. The chair was empty, half turned to face me. A candle on the orange crate looked like it had extinguished itself when it burnt down far enough, and no other sound or movement. No mind-altering scene from a horror movie, just an empty apartment.

I must have really pissed Sarah off and she had left to go visit her sister or something. I felt foolish, I had raced around like a girl possessed, spooked myself by an unlocked door and still stood in the same spot.

Just in case, I softly called Sarah's name out loud, partly to see if my throat still could stretch to speak and partly, just in case - just in case someone lurking in the living room that I couldn't see, if they attacked me I could still turn and run.

Nothing.

When you begin to relax after being on 'all alerts' it feels like a warm sensation that starts at the top of your skull and ends at the tip of your two big toes. Off alert, I headed to the bedroom to toss my bag and grab some clothes to change into, laughing at myself and my overactive imagination.

I swung the door open a bit too hard, bouncing off the wall and coming back to hit me with equal force, jarring me to take in the scene before me. In the far corner was Sarah, sitting on the single bed, hugging her knees to her chest, staring - at nothing - just staring and rocking slightly forward and back until her head hit the wall behind her. The bed was a mess of sheets, twisted and patterned with a dark stain.

I walked toward her and her eyes never focused on my movement. Cautiously I reached out to touch her arm that was closest to me. It was as if from the moment she felt the heat of my touch a gurgling scream started from deep within some inner place, resonated off the bare walls in a soul shattering 'NO'.

The rest was a flurry, an explosion, Sarah hitting at me like a windmill, screaming and rambling, crying and laughing, all the while not seeing me, her eyes remained unfocused.

When I finally subdued her, locking her with my arms, half on the bed and half off, screaming her name over and over, a flicker of recognition came over her eyes. From a flicker came a deep penetrating stare of bewilderment, to scrunching up in a mournful wailing and crying.

We rocked, her in my arms, both crying in the dim stale room. Hearing the commotion, the couple from the second-floor apartment was frozen in the doorway of the room. No one knew what to do next, nor could fathom how this had happened.

As the details of the room and the bed began to be taken in, it was obvious that there had been quite a struggle, the stains, and the smell, little doubt that Sarah had been raped.

She must have used every ounce of her hundred-pound little body in the struggle. She was bloody, bruised, her cheeks swollen and red, dried blood left a trail from her nose, even a clump of her hair was missing from the back of her head leaving a hard crust in its place.

Rocking gave way to sitting, the wailing to quiet sporadic body shudders. The three of us exchanged glances for the first time since discovering Sarah. As if of one mind, somehow we carried, walked Sarah to the second floor bathroom and began the clean up.

For someone who was ridiculously modest before, she let us attend to the matter, still staring at some point that kept her inside herself and away from us. Her only speech was to say: "hotter". We couldn't get the bath hot enough for her, as she turned a brilliant red, we were slow to realize it was never to be hot enough, there was nothing that could obliterate what had happened to her.

By mid morning she was starting to come around. We managed to get her to

sip on honey lemon tea, still in the second floor apartment, where we hadn't faced upstairs. The husband of the couple had made himself scarce to give Sarah some non-male space, and had busied himself with cleaning up the mess of the attack.

By noon, five hours had passed and the shock had retreated, leaving in its place the dread of what to do next. The couple was reunited and the four of us prepared ourselves for the discussion we all knew had to happen.

"Sarah, do you know who did this?" I asked in a whisper.

The rocking began, but we maintained her focus. It was obvious she was ready to retreat at any time.

"Sarah, look at me." I tried again. "We just want to help. Help us."

This was a long drawn out process, Sarah's contributions being mostly nods or tears. By one o'clock we had pieced together who and when, the landlord and just after my call.

The world spins when you feel that everything you have known is out-of-control.

I clearly don't remember whose idea it was, but I do remember that no one questioned or doubted that it was the right thing to do. Justice must prevail, we must protect others, we must make sure that this never happens again, we must report this to the police. They will know what to do, clearly, we don't.

It was understood that it would be me alone that took Sarah to the police station. That would give the couple enough time to move the marijuana plants growing on their balcony to a safe new place, and whatever else was necessary before the cops descended upon the crime scene. How naive we all turned out to be.

As Sarah and I started the five block walk to the cop shop, I turned to wave to the Couple, our second floor neighbours, whose names I didn't even know, but whose bath tub we had been using for the last six months. I couldn't have

faced this without their help, and I would never see them again, never get to say thanks.

Neither Sarah nor I had ever been to a police station, we walked in with all the aplomb of what we were, two kids from the burbs, regardless of the last six months of living in the city. Inside was like a country unto itself. We were the foreigners. Everyone else moved with purpose, in uniform or obviously guests of the uniforms.

Weaving our way through the throng, we arrived at the reception area. Bored and not even prepared to look up to see who we were, we were waved to a bench, so there we sat. I'm sure our eyes were bugged out, trying not to look at the circus of people that continued to file past.

Time crept by.

When an hour had passed, holding Sarah's hand, we made our way back to the reception desk. I had a bit more courage this time. I didn't accept the non-look wave towards the bench, and asked to speak to someone.

"You would." Came the sarcastic response. "And who would that be? Got a badge no.?"

I would have left right then and there if I had any idea of where to go. I was losing Sarah, she had begun to do that staring thing again. I did the next sensible thing to do, I started to cry, not sob, but definitely tears were streaming down my cheeks, over which I had no control.

Sarah started to sway and hum.

We caught their attention.

In microseconds two non-uniform detectives appeared on either side of us. My vision of the police was obviously tainted by the various movies and TV shows. These two men were cut from the same cloth, over six foot, large meat hands, ruddy complexion, overweight, and glistening skin, the kind people get when they have far too many beers the night before.

In a blur we were escorted up the stairs, down the hall and into two separate rooms, where once inside the door slammed shut with an authoritative bam.

I suppose the windows looked out onto the street, but between the wire mesh embedded in the glass and the grime, from both inside and out, they cast more of an amber glow of light that was absorbed by the green cast of the overhead fluorescent bulbs.

Everything was well used, the table edges worn, the vinyl chairs cracked and seams split, cigarette burns on every surface that could hold a cigarette. The door must never stay open, the air was as stale as the day they had built the building.

I hadn't learned yet, we don't ask the questions, we are to reply to the questions they ask. Three hours later, I could just see the detective through the fog of cigarette smoke that he had caused. I was not allowed to leave, I was not allowed to see Sarah, I was not allowed a drink of water, I was not allowed to go to the bath room, I was not allowed to stand up, I was nothing, I was not the accuser, I was the accused!

How ironic this was, I was only the bystander and yet this didn't matter. Who knows what was happening to Sarah. I started this interview intimidated and was gathering righteous strength as the hours passed.

Their mistake was letting it take that long, my mistake was letting it even begin.

During the three hours I had been accused of being a prostitute, these were the only women that ever complained, I had asked for it, I was a dyke (I had been holding Sarah's hand) and I was nothing. I was not worthy of the 'dirt on their shoes'. That one stuck. I still remember it today after all these years. The detective's accusations and abusive way didn't need to be based in reality, he was on a roll, and he was the one with power.

There comes a moment when the events of the day stop swimming before

you and you cross over the threshold of no longer caring, a 'it can't get any worse' strength. I stood up. I physically did not do what I was told and stood up. Nothing happened.

Gaining momentum I no longer asked, I told them to bring me Sarah or take me to her, we were leaving.

"You can't leave, little lady." came the thundering response. "I'll charge you with solicitation."

With that blast the detective swung the door open and yelled into the hallway, "Frank! Frank! Get in here."

A younger, thinner version of the detective trotted through the door, "Yeah."

"You witnessed this c@#\$ soliciting me." The soliciting was drawn out and dripping with sarcasm.

Younger, thinner said "Yeah".

Cornered, I summoned up the key to our release, "If you're going to arrest me, do it now and let's get my lawyer here cause I'm leaving and I'm leaving with Sarah." By this point I was past shouting and more screaming the words.

The bluff worked. I was unceremoniously led down the hall without another word being spoken. The detective opened the door of another interrogation room and left, without one word or look back.

Sarah sat at the end of the table, rocking and staring. The second detective was sitting alongside the table, leaning back, legs stretched out, feet crossed on top of the table, blowing smoke rings into the air with one hand and holding a paper cup of coffee in the other.

He glanced over to me, slid his feet off the table, dropped the cigarette into the cup of coffee, dropped the cup into the overflowing garbage can as he left and never said a word.

For over three hours we had tried to do our civic duty, I was humiliated, yelled at and threatened, Sarah had been ignored with smoke rings blown her

way by the looks of things when I came in.

There I stood, no further ahead than when we walked in, terrified to go back to the apartment, no one in sight who would help, with Sarah lost somewhere in a world I couldn't enter.

This is not how the way the world is supposed to work.

I wasn't prepared for this.

Looking back, my life is filled with pivotal moments, moments when a change takes place and there is no turning back. I gained strength through this. I also know that I will never let this happen to me again. How naively brave a thought.

JOIN ME ON MY JOURNEY, ORDER NOW

laracraig.com