

Amber Frey



WITNESS

For the Prosecution of Scott Peterson

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 HarperCollins e-books

For victims of violence. And for their families.

*“No temptation has seized you except what is common to man.
And God is faithful; He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted,
He will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.”*

1 CORINTHIANS 10:13, NIV



CONTENTS

[I “Can I trust you with my heart?”](#)

[II “Please God, tell me it’s not the same Scott Peterson.”](#)

[III “We have been praying for someone like you to come forward.”](#)

[IV “Oh my God! Laci’s baby is due on my birthday!”](#)

[V “Isn’t that a little twisted, Scott?”](#)

[VI “I know I’m innocent. They know I’m innocent. Everyone close to this knows I’m innocent.”](#)

[VII “Good-bye for now.”](#)

[VIII “The day you went to the police, you became Laci’s voice.”](#)

[IX “I can do everything through Him who gives me strength.”](#)

[PHOTOS](#)

[ACKNOWLEDGMENTS](#)

[ABOUT THE AUTHOR](#)

[CREDITS](#)

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[ABOUT THE PUBLISHER](#)



I

“Can I trust you with my heart?”

I first met Scott Peterson on November 20, 2002, at the Elephant Bar, in Fresno, California. It was a blind date—my best friend, Shawn Sibley, had set us up—and I got there before he did. I took a seat on a bench in the glass-walled foyer, within view of the walkway, and every time someone approached I looked up. I had butterflies in my stomach. I had a feeling my life was about to change. Scott Peterson sounded absolutely perfect.

Shawn had met him at a convention in Anaheim. She had been very impressed. Scott was intelligent, good-looking, and very funny, and he seemed eager to settle down. “Do you think there’s a special person that you’re meant to be with forever?” he had asked Shawn. From anyone else, the line may have seemed like a come on, but Scott was different. Shawn had told him that she was in a committed relationship, and he never once made a single flirtatious comment, never once tried to cross the line. At the end of the business day, she and Scott joined a few people for drinks and dinner. At one point he joked about putting the words “Horny Bastard” on his business card, thinking it might help him meet women, but mostly he behaved like a perfect gentleman. By the end of the evening, Shawn had a plan. “There’s someone I want you to meet,” she said.

“Who?” Scott asked.

“My best friend.”

Shawn called me the next day to tell me about Scott and to ask if she could give him my number. I was full of questions. “What did you say about me?” I began.

“That you were beautiful and a good person,” Shawn said.

“What was he like? Is he nice? Is he cute?”

“Very cute. And he couldn’t be nicer.”

“And he’s serious?”

“*Very*. He said he was looking for someone special, and he asked if I knew anyone who was interested in a committed relationship.”

“And?”

“And I thought of you, of course.”

I didn’t hear from Scott for several weeks, and when we finally connected he couldn’t have been

sweeter. He asked if I was free for dinner the following evening, and we made plans to rendezvous at the Elephant Bar.

“How will I recognize you?” I asked.

“Well, I’m not very tall,” he said. “And I have long, greasy hair and a big, loose belly.”

“That’s good,” I joked back. “I’m real tall and I weigh about a hundred and sixty pounds.”

“Really?” he asked, laughing.

“No, not really,” I said. “I’m thin and small-framed, five foot seven and a half, with blond hair.”

“Good,” he said. “Then it won’t be a problem if I walk up to every attractive blond in the place and ask if she’s Amber.”

Shortly after six on the appointed evening, Shawn came over to stay with my baby daughter, Ayiana. “Just remember that I have to be at work tomorrow morning,” Shawn said, only half-joking.

“Don’t worry,” I said. “I know.”

I arrived at the Elephant Bar with time to spare. At exactly four minutes after seven, as I sat waiting for Scott, a man approached and made eye contact. I thought it might be Scott—he *sort of* fit the description—but I had a bad feeling about him. “Please God,” I thought, “don’t let it be him.” I looked away, and—much to my relief—he moved through the foyer and disappeared into the restaurant. A moment later, another man approached; in my heart I knew and hoped that this was Scott. He was a shade over six feet tall, in good shape, and he was wearing a well-cut suit. He stepped through the glass door and lit up when he saw me.

“Amber?”

“Scott?” I replied, getting to my feet.

He leaned close and gave me a small peck on the cheek. “Am I late? I’m sorry I’m late.”

“Not at all,” I said.

The plan had been to meet at seven, in front of the Elephant Bar, and to go to dinner from there, so we left and made our way to the parking lot.

“I was a little nervous about meeting you,” Scott said en route, but he didn’t look nervous to me. He was smiling, and he seemed somehow relieved. “Can I ask you a favor?” he said.

“What?”

“I’ve been in this suit all day. Would you mind very much if we went to my hotel so I could check in and shower and change?”

I didn’t mind. It seemed reasonable. I left my car in the parking lot and we got into his Ford truck.

and drove to the Radisson in downtown Fresno. When we got there, he began to unload his things. ~~There was a big green lock-box in the cab of his truck, and his luggage was stashed inside.~~ Scott looked at me sheepishly, as if embarrassed. “Look at all this stuff,” he said. “I practically live out of my truck.”

We went inside and took the elevator to a room on the top floor. Scott put his luggage down and reached into a brown duffel bag and pulled out a bottle of champagne. He smiled, and I found myself thinking he had a very nice smile. He popped the cork and proceeded to pour each of us a glass. Clearly this was a man who planned ahead.

Scott had a sip and turned on the radio and excused himself and went off to take a shower. I nursed my champagne, singing to myself to pass the time.

When Scott emerged from the bathroom a few minutes later, he was wearing black slacks and a clean white T-shirt. He went off to get a blue dress shirt and was still buttoning it up when he rejoined me. I was wearing a black skirt and a blue top. “We match,” I said.

“So we do,” he said.

Then he seemed to remember something. He reached into the duffel bag again and pulled out a box of strawberries, and he dropped one into each of our glasses. I watched the champagne bubble up around it and I had another sip and looked at him. He was smiling again. It was a warm, friendly smile.

When we finished our drinks, we left the hotel and went to a Japanese restaurant on Shaw Avenue. We were led to a table, but Scott immediately excused himself. He returned a few minutes later to say he had arranged for a private room. He led the way over and we took our shoes off and stepped past the sliding bamboo door. The room had one table, low to the ground, and we sat next to each other on the floor.

In no time at all, we were in the midst of drinks and dinner, and our conversation flowed easily. Scott told me all about himself. He said he was a fertilizer salesman, that his travels took him all over the world—from Cairo to Paris—and that he lived, alone, in Sacramento, in a big, 1940s single-family home. “I’d love to have pets, but I travel so much it wouldn’t be fair to them,” he said.

I told him that I hadn’t traveled much at all, but that I hoped to some day. “I know this sounds a little crazy,” I said, “but when I was in junior college, I took two years of Swahili.”

“I don’t think that’s crazy at all,” he said. “I think that’s very cool.”

Scott told me he had acquired a taste for wine and that he belonged to several wine clubs. This impressed me. I like good wine myself and have always wanted to know more about it.

“I have a nice collection of good wine at home,” he said. “Every month, the various clubs ship me a few choice bottles.”

As the evening progressed, Scott said that he was looking forward to settling down, but that he hadn’t yet found the right person. The way he looked at me when he said that made me feel he might

be wondering whether *I* was that person.

Then I told him about my work as a massage therapist. He seemed genuinely interested and asked lots of questions about my clientele, hours, and techniques. I told him that business was good and that I was on the verge of going out on my own. I was working at a place called Backworks, but I was in the process of making arrangements to take a larger space at American Body Works.

As for my personal life, I admitted that I'd had my share of unhappy relationships, but that there was one very bright spot in my life: my daughter, Ayiana. She was twenty months old that very day.

Talking to Scott was easy. He told me about his mother, Jackie, who was ill with chronic bronchitis. He said he had a condo in San Diego, which was fully furnished, with a Land Rover in the garage, and that he was thinking of selling the entire package.

"I never use the place," he explained. "I found a couple who are interested in buying it just the way it is, including every last stick of furniture and the Land Rover."

As I listened to him, I grew more and more impressed. I thought, *This guy is hard-working, ambitious, and he makes a good living. He really has potential.*

We also talked about the coming holidays. Scott said he was going to be fishing in Alaska over Thanksgiving with one of his brothers, his father, and an uncle, and that he'd be spending Christmas in Kennebunkport with his family, as he did every year. After Christmas, he would be going to Paris with friends to celebrate the New Year, and then he'd take a week or two to do some business in other European cities.

I said I'd be spending Christmas with some close friends, a married couple I'll call the Bensons. "They're like a second family to me," I said. I told him that my parents had divorced when I was five and that there had been a lot of drama and a lot of back and forth when I was a kid, and that my mother was remarried and my father had been in a relationship for a while.

At one point, as we were finishing dinner, he put his hand on my back—a quiet, pleasant gesture—and said he was really enjoying the evening and would like to see me again. Everything felt very natural. I felt a nice connection to him.

"When are you going to see me again?" I asked. "Sounds like you're going to be gone for a long time."

"Not that long," he said. "I'll be back before the end of January." That was as specific as he got.

Suddenly the hostess came in to tell us that they were getting ready to close for the night, and we were the last two people in the restaurant. She could see we weren't done talking, so she suggested we go next door, to the karaoke lounge. We went over and Scott ordered a pair of gin and tonics—not that we needed them—and he told me we should get up and sing.

"No way," I said. "I'm not getting up in front of people. I'm too shy."

"Come on!" he said. "I heard you singing in the hotel room, when I got out of the shower. You have a beautiful voice."

~~He really wanted to get up there and sing, and he kept pestering me, but nicely, and I looked around and noticed that there were only a few people left in the place. So I said yes. We decided to try our luck with “Islands in the Stream,” which has two parts, male and female, and we launched in. We were terrible. I was laughing so hard I could barely catch my breath. But Scott kept singing, so I played along.~~

When the song was over, I apologized to the patrons for our performance—a couple of them actually clapped at this point—and we began to make our unsteady way back to the table. But a Frank Sinatra song came on, and I felt like dancing.

“I’m not a very good dancer,” Scott said.

“Don’t worry,” I said. “I’ll lead.”

I was pretty tipsy by this point, so we didn’t really dance much. We just sort of stood there and swayed. It was nice, though. It felt good just being close to him.

When we went back to our seats, Scott looked at me and asked if I was a smoker.

“No,” I said.

He leaned over and kissed me. “Oh yeah,” he said. “You are definitely not a smoker.”

A few minutes later, the lights went up and we realized it was time to go.

We got into his truck and drove over to the Food Maxx for a bottle of gin, which we also didn’t need, then returned to the Radisson. I was in no condition to drive home, so I went up to his room. When we stepped inside, he turned and kissed me again, somewhat more passionately this time.

“I don’t know if I’m ready to be with you,” I said, but my resistance soon faded and I ended up spending the night. I liked him. I could see myself falling for a man like Scott Peterson.

In the morning, early, Shawn called me on my cell phone. She didn’t ask any questions, but she reminded me that she had to go to work. We got dressed and Scott drove me back to my car, which was still in the Elephant Bar parking lot. There was a ticket on the wind-shield, and I gave it to him. “Here’s a little memento for you,” I said. I wasn’t feeling all that good about myself, and about having spent the night, and I guess I was trying to be funny. But Scott didn’t seem to think it was funny. He looked very serious. “I really want to see you again,” he said. “Do you want to see me?”

“Yes,” I said. “I do. I guess I just feel a little weird about last night. It felt like a one-night stand and I don’t do one-night stands.”

“It wasn’t a one-night stand,” he said. “I know we just met, but I think we really connected. I really like being with you, and I want to spend more time with you and get to know you better. I’m sorry I have to leave town so soon.”

“Will you call me?”

“Sure,” he said. “I’m not real good about phones, but I’ll try.”

We kissed good-bye and I got in my car and drove off. I didn’t look back. I felt certain we would see each other again.

I got home and told Shawn that I’d had a very nice evening, but she didn’t have time for details. Then I took my daughter, Ayiana, to preschool, and made my way to Backworks.

Scott called later that day. He had gone to a meeting and was passing through Fresno again, and he wanted to come over and see me. But I was tired and I had more clients that afternoon. He said he understood and promised to call again.

The next day, Scott called and left a message. “I’m kicking myself,” he said. “I wish I could have seen you at least once more before my trip.” He called a couple of days later to tell me that he was on his way to Alaska. He said he had picked up a book about nature hikes in California, and that there were some pretty amazing trails around Fresno. “Maybe we’ll go on a hike when I get back,” he said.

“That would be nice,” I said.

On Monday, December 2, Scott called in the early afternoon and told me he was back in Fresno, not far from my house. “Are you ready for that hike?” he asked.

I gave him directions to my house and he got lost and called back and I guided him through the neighborhood. He arrived with some amaryllis and two bags of groceries. “I brought a little something for dinner,” he said. “I hope that wasn’t too presumptuous. I brought stuff for the hike, too.”

“Not presumptuous at all,” I said. “It sounds great.”

“Where’s the little one?” he asked.

“At school,” I said. “I’m on my way to pick her up. You want to come with me?”

“I’d love to,” he said, and he sounded genuinely excited.

We put the groceries away and he had nice things to say about my place. I was living in Rolling Hills at the time, in Madera County, in an 800-square-foot guest house. It had one bedroom, and a tiled kitchen, and a big, open living room. Ayiana and I were very happy there.

We went outside and transferred the car-seat into his truck and went off to get Ayiana.

“How was Alaska?” I said.

“Beautiful,” he said. “Look.” He showed me a photograph of himself near a stream, holding a fish. It was taken at such a long distance that it was hard to make out much detail. “I’ll have to take you there some day,” he said.

When we got to the school, we went inside together and I briefly introduced him to the director, close friend. Ayiana was very happy to see me, as always, and when we got outside she couldn’t

believe we were about to climb into a real truck.

“It’s Scott’s truck,” I told her.

“Scott truck, Scott truck, Scott truck!” she squealed.

“She is so incredibly cute,” Scott said, glowing. “Listen to her talk!”

My God, I thought. This guy is perfect. Scott picked her up to put her in her car-seat and Ayiana took to him right away. He told her we were going on a hike, and she repeated the word: “Hike, hike, hike!”

We drove to nearby Auberry—I’d been there many times before, but never with Ayiana—and we walked along a trail to a place called Squaw’s Leap. Ayiana held both our hands all the way to the clearing, where we stopped to picnic on the snacks that Scott had brought along. He also had a blanket with him, and he laid it out on the grass. He seemed very happy. He couldn’t stop grinning at me and Ayiana. “Look at me,” he said. “I’ve got a rigor mortis smile.”

It was very beautiful, but a little chilly, so we soon headed back. Ayiana was tired and Scott ended up carrying her most of the way. When we reached the truck, it was beginning to get dark, and we sat in the open cab to watch the stars come up.

“Let’s see who can spot the very first star,” Scott suggested, turning it into a competition. He won. A few stars later, Ayiana was fast asleep.

Scott talked about Thanksgiving and about families—and how complicated they were. “Some relatives you don’t really like but you have to get along with them because they’re family,” he said.

“I know what you mean,” I said. “Anyone who has a family knows.”

Scott managed a half smile. I got the impression that one of his relatives was rubbing him the wrong way, but I didn’t want to pry. When the temperature began to drop, we got back inside the truck and went back to my place.

The minute we walked in, Scott took me aside and told me that he had brought a little something for Ayiana. “I didn’t know whether it was appropriate for me to give her a gift, so I thought I’d clear with you,” he said. I couldn’t believe this guy: he was so considerate. I told him it was fine and thanked him for discussing it with me. “If you had given her a present when you first met, I would have questioned your motives,” I said. “But since she already knows you and likes you, I’m sure it will be fine.”

He gave Ayiana her present and she eagerly tore the wrapping to shreds. There was a beautiful book inside—a richly detailed Christmas pop-up book—and Scott sat her on his lap and went through it with her. They looked really cute together. I was so happy to see this side of Scott. When Ayiana began grabbing at the pop-ups, I worried she might rip them. “I think we’d better keep that beautiful book away from her busy little hands,” I said. “At least until she’s old enough to appreciate it.”

The next thing I knew, Scott had started preparing dinner. He made an elaborate seafood lasagna. As soon as the pan went into the oven, he opened a bottle of wine—he’d brought that, too—and I took

the cork from his hands. "I'm going to keep this," I said. "It feels like it means something."

I told him that a friend of mine had a huge glass container at home filled with corks, and that he dated them and jotted down the names of the people he'd shared the bottle with. I thought it was a great idea: you could reach into your collection of corks and read the names and dates and think back to those particular evenings. I grabbed a pen. "I'm going to date this and put our names on it," I said.

"Did you save the cork from our first bottle of champagne?" he asked.

"No," I said. "I didn't think about it then."

"That's okay," he said. "There are plenty of corks to come."

I felt unusually comfortable around Scott, as if I'd known him for a very long time. I didn't feel I had to try to be anyone other than who I was, and it seemed as if he felt very much the same way. In a word, being with Scott was effortless.

He spent the night.

The next day, Tuesday, December 3, he called to say he was coming back into Fresno, and that he would probably be in town till morning. I had a client at 5:30 that evening, and Ayiana had to be picked up by 6:00 p.m. I had asked my mother to get her, but suddenly it occurred to me that Scott could pick her up. I realize I didn't know him very well, and that it seemed a little hasty, but I had seen them together and I had been very pleasantly surprised at the way Ayiana took to him. I had never asked anyone other than my mother to pick Ayiana up at school. I'm an intensely protective parent. But for some strange reason I didn't have the slightest hesitation with Scott.

"Would you mind getting her for me?" I asked.

"No, I'd be honored," he said. "I'm just worried she won't want to leave with me."

"She'll leave with you," I assured him. "She likes you. I think she'll be excited to see you."

I dropped the car-seat and the key to my apartment at Ayiana's school and went off to take care of my client. When I got home, at around 6:45, I found Ayiana in her high chair, happily eating dinner and Scott nearby, busily chopping tomatoes for bruschetta. He had a glass of wine in his hand and he poured one for me and welcomed me home like it was the most natural thing in the world.

"How'd it go at school?" I asked.

"Great," he said. "I ran into your director friend and she was very nice, but they still checked me out at the front office, and even asked for my ID. I thought that was very cool. I like the fact that they're so security conscious."

I looked over at Ayiana—she was happy and smiling—then I looked back at Scott. This handsome man was beaming at me, and the place was filled with all sorts of wonderful, homey cooking smells. I felt like I had a family; a real family.

After dinner, we went out to get a Christmas tree. My dad had said I could borrow his truck, but

with Scott's Ford outside I didn't need it. We bundled Ayiana up and drove to the lot and Scott picked a tree we all liked. I went to pay for it, and Ayiana and Scott stood by the small bonfire, staring at the petting zoo, which was all lit up. The man who owned the place made change and I joined them by the petting zoo, and before long the owner had wandered over and was smiling at us. I guess he thought we were a nice, happy family. "Your parents sure bundled you up nicely," he told Ayiana. Scott and I looked at each other, but neither of us bothered to correct him.

We took the tree home and set it up and I went to get the ornaments out of the closet. I returned to find Scott draped over the loveseat. It had been a long day—miles of road, hours of meetings—and he was tired. He looked so handsome and so comfortable, and he looked so much like he *belonged*, and I couldn't help myself: "Have you ever been married?" I asked.

"No," he said.

"Ever get close?"

"No," he said. "Never."

I didn't say anything, but my heart jumped a little. I was full of hope. I turned and began to decorate the tree and Scott asked me to tell him stories about the ornaments. Even *that* impressed me—the fact that he knew that Christmas ornaments are often connected to stories. I told him that I had been a preschool teacher for seven years and that most of my ornaments had been gifts from my students. My favorite was a little angel made out of a single clothespin. It had crinkly hair, a little cotton dress, and a tiny halo made of tinsel and wire. Ayiana kept pulling at the ornaments, so I began to replace them with her collection of Beanie Babies, but she tried to pull these down, too. Scott and I were laughing and having a good time.

"Baby, baby!" she said, yelping with delight.

The way Scott looked at her, and at me, and, well—it's hard to describe. He seemed so happy and peaceful. I went over and cuddled with him on the loveseat. He put his arm around me and pulled me closer to his warm body, and I felt as if I were about to melt. It had been a very long time since I'd felt that comfortable with a man. In fact, as I thought back on it, I realized that I hadn't been close to anyone since Ayiana's father, who had left shortly after I became pregnant. I really needed someone in my life, but I guess I'd been fighting it.

Still, I was lonely—and I couldn't deny it. My friends always said, "Oh, Amber—your life is perfect. You have Ayiana. You have a nice home. You have a great job. You have your independence. What more could you want?"

I guess they were simply trying to be supportive. Or maybe their relationships weren't all that great and they envied my strength and independence. But I was tired of being strong and independent. I wanted someone to lean on, someone to come home to.

I often took long walks, pushing Ayiana along in the stroller, and I'd see couples here and there, walking hand in hand, and I would think, "That's what I want. I want a partner." And I would have long conversations with God. I would say, "I know I have a lot to be thankful for—this beautiful daughter you've given me, this good life—and I know I shouldn't complain, but I can't help it: I'm

lonely.” And I swear that one night I heard God answering—not so much in a human voice; it was more of a feeling, really—and He said, “It’s all right to feel lonely. You *do* need someone, Amber. And you’ll find someone.”

It was only a short time later that Shawn told me about Scott. “You know, I have never met anyone that I thought was good enough for you,” she had told me. “But this guy is funny and smart and polite and good-looking and a real gentleman. And he’s looking to settle down.”

Shawn had always been very protective of me. She had been around when my relationship with Ayiana’s father fell apart, and she had seen me literally curled up in pain. And she had been there when I pulled myself out of my depression, and got back on my feet, and turned my life around. But she knew I was lonely.

“This guy is a great catch,” she had told me. “If I wasn’t in love with Tommy, I would definitely be seriously interested in Scott Peterson.”

She was right. Scott Peterson was a great catch. And at that moment he was right there in my living room, in my loveseat, pressed up next to me. It felt good and right and very promising.

“What are you thinking?” I asked him.

“Nothing,” he said, smiling. “That I’m so comfortable. Your home is very relaxing. I’m enjoying watching you and Ayiana. I’m happy.” He yawned and looked at his watch. “I better get going,” he noted. “I’ll get a hotel for the night.”

“Don’t be silly,” I said. “Stay here.”

Shortly thereafter, Ayiana curled up in her favorite spot in the living room and was soon peacefully asleep. Scott and I retired to the bedroom, and—perhaps because I was feeling hopeful about Scott, perhaps because I so much wanted things to work out between us—I found myself talking to him about trust. “It’s so much better to tell someone the truth, even if it’s hard, than to tell a lie,” I said. “Because even a tiny lie leads to mistrust. And once trust has been broken, it’s hard to rebuild.”

“I agree with you,” Scott said.

“I find it a lot easier to deal with the truth, no matter how painful, than with lies.”

I told him about an ex-boyfriend who had assured me that he wasn’t into pornography, and how I’d come to discover a huge stash of dirty magazines in his possession. I didn’t approve of the magazines, but that wasn’t the real issue. The real issue was that he had lied to me about something so minor. If he could lie about that, he was capable of lying about anything at all. “That’s why, for me, I’d always rather know the truth, whatever it is,” I told Scott.

“That’s an unusual quality,” Scott said. “You’re an amazing woman.”

After we made love, and long after he had fallen asleep, I found myself clinging to him. I didn’t know what I’d done to deserve this wonderful man. He was smart, charming, sexy. He treated me with respect and kindness. And he was absolutely great with Ayiana. I knew it was still early in the relationship, but I began to see us making a life together. Maybe I was rushing things—in my mind,

anyway—but I was almost certain I was rushing to a beautiful place.

The next morning, while Scott was still asleep, I bathed and fed Ayiana and took her to school. I returned to find him in the kitchen, his hair still damp from the shower. “I think I really like you,” I said, kissing him.

“I *know* I really like you,” he replied.

I had an art show to attend the following night, at the Fresno Art Museum, and I asked Scott if he would come with me. By this time he had almost finished dressing and was getting ready to leave. I realized I missed him already.

“I wish I could,” he said. “I have to go to San Francisco.” He was going on business, and once that was taken care of he had arranged to go boating with some friends. He said he didn’t expect to be back in the Fresno area before the weekend.

I was eager to see him again, so I told him that Shawn was having a party on December 11, for her fiancé, Tommy, and that I had a formal to go to on December 14, a fund-raiser, and was hoping that he would be able to go to that, too. He said he’d love to go to both.

He accompanied me to my new office, at American Body Works, on Sixth Street, and helped me set up. We put up my certificates and some racks, and I could see that Scott was handy with tools. I know it’s silly, but this impressed me, too. We then set up my massage table, and I ended up giving Scott a massage. It was all very professional—I treated him as I treat all my clients—and when we were done we went to the bank drive-thru and Scott withdrew a large amount of money. He wanted to pay me for the massage, and I tried to refuse, but Scott insisted and even added a 20 percent tip. Then we went off to Whole Foods for lunch. I had the tortilla soup, which was great, and Scott told me that he loved to cook, and that he had this great big kitchen at home. “I’d really enjoy cooking for you,” he said.

“I’d like that, too,” I replied.

As we left Whole Foods, I saw a big stack of Pink Lady apples, and I told him that when I was pregnant with Ayiana I had been wearing braces, and I couldn’t eat apples. I said that months later, when I finally bit into a caramel apple, it had been a big disappointment because it wasn’t a Pink Lady. After lunch, we went our separate ways, and all I could think about was how much I enjoyed Scott’s company.

On the 5th, I went to the art opening and ran into my friend Saki Vincent. She was a client, and a graphic designer, and a single mom, like me, and we had become pretty good friends. I told her all about Scott and admitted that I was pretty smitten, which I guess was obvious: I couldn’t seem to keep the excitement out of my voice.

“You deserve someone good in your life,” she said. “I hope he’s the one.”

The next day, December 6, Shawn was discussing business with a colleague and happened to mention Scott by name. The colleague knew the name: he had once interviewed with Scott for a job. He told Shawn that Scott was married and lived in Modesto. Shawn was sure he was mistaken, that it

must be a different Scott Peterson, but he insisted: "I'm telling you, it's the same Scott Peterson. I'm the guy."

As soon as she got off the phone, Shawn dialed Scott's number and got through and confronted him. "Tell me I didn't set my best friend up on a date with a married man?!" she said, already angry.

"What?!"

"I just got off the phone with someone who says he knows you. He says you're married and live in Modesto."

"That's crazy! It must be another Scott Peterson."

"I don't believe you," Shawn said. "I'm going to look into this. Amber is my best friend, and I don't want to see her get hurt."

Shawn got off the phone and logged onto the Internet and gained access to Sacramento County records. Within minutes, she discovered that Scott Peterson was indeed married and that he did indeed live in Modesto. She called him back, very angry now, and told him what she'd learned. Scott didn't answer right away, and a moment later she heard him crying.

"Scott? Are you still there? What's going on?"

"I'm sorry," he said, still crying. "I'm sorry I lied to you. It's just—I lost my wife. It's been very hard for me. I haven't fully dealt with it yet."

Shawn was horrified. She didn't know what to say. She stammered an apology of her own. "Oh my God. I'm so sorry, Scott. I had no idea."

"Please," Scott said. "I beg you: don't tell Amber. I really care for Amber, and I don't want to screw this up. Let me tell her myself. I want to tell her in person."

"Absolutely," Shawn replied. "That's fine. I just—you know—I just didn't want Amber to get hurt. That was the reason I confronted you. Amber isn't looking for someone to have sex with. She's looking for someone with whom she can spend her life."

"That is totally what *I'm* looking for," he said. "I mean it. I'm not going to blow this, Shawn. Please trust me. Let me tell Amber myself."

Shawn decided to respect Scott's wishes. He sounded genuine, and genuinely torn. And for good reason: the poor guy had lost his wife. Shawn had wanted to ask him how he had lost his wife—to illness? in an accident? to another man?—but it didn't seem appropriate. And she imagined she'd find out eventually, probably from me.

I didn't know this at the time, of course. Just as I didn't know that two days later, on December 11, Scott was looking through the classifieds for a fishing boat, nor that on the same day he was scouring the Internet for information on currents in the San Francisco Bay and began negotiating for the boat. The following day, Scott purchased the fishing boat for fourteen hundred dollars, then visited a sport fishing site to determine what kind of fish were in season.

That same day, Scott came to see me at home. This is how I recalled the visit for the police, several weeks later, when they came to my apartment. I was pretty nervous, which I know they understood, and it showed:

“So he’s wearing a blue suit and he had his International Rotary pin on and I said hi and... how are you, and he’s like not good and I said what and he was just like, I really need to talk to you and I [said] okay....”

“...he was very upset, very distraught about something he had done that was very devastating possibly to what could be a beautiful relationship and that he uh was just like I need you to come in here, he moved the chairs. He sat in that chair there, I was sitting there, he was sitting there and was pretty mad, was up pacing a little bit and [said], okay, well, what, I couldn’t understand, well, what is it? And he said you know I really would just be so, it’d be so much easier if you just hated me and you didn’t wanna see me again and, and I’d understand and, and...I just, I hate myself so much right now.... Then he talked to me about lying and then, and then he goes I just...had such a horrible weekend this week and it wasn’t fun for anybody ’cause I had this on my mind and I was like, What?! You know, and I’m holding his hand and he was crying, his stomach kept churning and he was having trouble swallowing and tears were pouring down out of his eyes. And he said, I lied to you about being, you asked me if I’d been married and I have, but it’s...in my past and it’s so hard for me, because I just, I’ve had such a hard time dealing with...and uh I said okay. And...I’m thinking well she’s passed away you know, and...he goes you know I haven’t said very much, but obviously you know that, you know, she’s not with me and he goes...I wanted to talk, be able to talk to you about this and I was going to talk to you about this when I came back from Europe, but he was, this was on my mind and I had to let it all out, and I was like okay. And I go I’m sorry this was so hard for you to tell me and I thank you for sharing this with me. And, and I...there will be a time for you, you know, to share more and he’s like... taking breaths and he’s having trouble swallowing. He’s like...you’re not mad and I said how can I be mad if something, you know, is...how can I possibly for...that’s understandable if you have a loss.... And he goes, and, and he said uh this will be the first holidays without her....”

It was terrible. There was one point, early on, just as he began to talk, when I said, “Geez, Scott—for moment there I thought you were going to tell me you were married.”

And he said, “No, no, no!” And he kept asking me if I was mad. And I told him no, I wasn’t. How could I be mad? And he said, “You have no idea how hard this is for me. I never talk about her, with anyone. When I meet new people, I act like my marriage never even happened.”

I was curious, of course. Who wouldn’t be? But I was also concerned. When he said that this would be his first holiday without her, I realized that the loss was very recent, and I wondered whether he should take more time to grieve. I was thinking about him, not about myself, and I asked him, “Are you ready for a relationship with me?”

“God, yes!” he said.

I didn't see Scott again for several days, and I was feeling confused and a little fearful. He had lied to me, and it was hurtful, but I could understand why he had lied, and I had no right to stand in judgment of him, so I worked at putting it behind me. After all, he was the one who had suffered an unimaginable loss. It was my job to be there for him, and to be as understanding as humanly possible.

That following evening, December 10, Ayiana was running across the living room when she tripped on the rug and fell against the stereo cabinet, cutting her head open. There was blood gushing from her forehead and I grabbed a towel and called the landlord to ask him to take us to the hospital. It was only five minutes away, but my car was a stick shift, and I knew I couldn't manage it. He was home, luckily, and we rushed over to Valley Children's Hospital, where the doctors stitched her right up. I called Scott from the hospital and reached his voicemail, but I didn't leave a message. I didn't want to upset him unnecessarily. Then I took Ayiana home and comforted her and put her to bed.

Scott came over the following afternoon and behaved like a perfect angel. He was incredibly sweet to Ayiana and even changed her bandage and later asked me how I had handled the accident: "I mean, you know, as a mother—to see your daughter bleeding like that? How do you handle something like that? It must be incredibly hard to see your daughter in pain." And I said, "You don't even think about it. You just do what needs to be done. I guess it's maternal instinct."

That was the night of the party for Shawn's fiancé, but we also had the formal to think about, so while Ayiana was at school we went down to the Fashion Fair Mall to rent a tuxedo for Scott. We went home and I went to get Ayiana and we hung out, and when it was time for the party I slipped into a pair of blue jeans. Scott went in casual pants and a blue shirt.

I distinctly remember what he wore because I saw him in this same shirt several weeks later, on the news, when the networks were busy reporting on his missing wife, Laci. One of the photographs showed Scott and Laci together, and Scott was wearing that very same shirt.

Just before we left for the party, I called Shawn and asked her if she could try to snap a photograph of Scott, Ayiana, and me. I asked her to be discreet, however, because the photograph was going to be the centerpiece of a Christmas ornament I intended to make for Scott.

"You got it," she said.

"Thanks," I said. "I really appreciate this."

The party was at Shawn's house, about half-an-hour away, and there were plenty of other children there. It was lots of fun and everyone was taking pictures, but the battery on Shawn's camera died and I never got the shot I wanted. Instead, there was a photograph of Scott sitting in a chair, holding a beer, with me leaning toward him. When Scott later went on trial for murder, that photograph was entered as evidence.

That night, however, I was with a different Scott altogether. The Scott at my side was outgoing and personable and charming and very much able to take care of himself, and clearly everyone really liked him. I didn't get much of a chance to talk to Shawn—she was too busy being a good hostess—but at one point I got the feeling she had something to tell me. It was the way she was looking at me. "What?" I asked her at one point. But before she could answer Tommy came by and dragged her away.

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