

Gender Fraud

a fiction

Peg Tittle

Magenta

Also by Peg Tittle

fiction

Impact
It Wasn't Enough
Exile
What Happened to Tom

screenplays

Exile
What Happened to Tom
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Critical Thinking: An Appeal to Reason
What If? Collected Thought Experiments in Philosophy
Should Parents be Licensed? (editor)
Ethical Issues in Business: Inquiries, Cases, and Readings
Philosophy: Questions and Theories (contributing author)

Impact

“Edgy, insightful, terrific writing, propelled by rage against rape. Tittle writes in a fast-paced, dialogue-driven style that hurtles the reader from one confrontation to the next. Chock full of painful social observations” Hank Pellissier, Director of Humanist Global Charity

“ ... The idea of pinning down the inflictors of this terror is quite appealing” Alison Lashinsky

It Wasn't Enough

“Unlike far too many novels, this one will make you think, make you uncomfortable, and then make you reread it” C. Osborne, moonspeaker.ca

“... a powerful and introspective dystopia It is a book I truly recommend for a book club as the discussions could be endless” Mesca Elin, Psychochromatic Redemption

“Tittle’s book hits you hard” D. Sohi, Goodreads

Exile

“Thought-provoking stuff, as usual from Peg Tittle.” James M. Fisher, Goodreads

What Happened to Tom

“This powerful book plays with the gender gap to throw into high relief the infuriating havoc unwanted pregnancy can wreak on a woman’s life. Once you’ve read *What Happened to Tom*, you’ll never forget it.” Elizabeth Greene, *Understories* and *Moving*

“I read this in one sitting, less than two hours, couldn’t put it down. Fantastic allegorical examination of the gendered aspects of unwanted pregnancy. A must-read for everyone, IMO.” Jessica, Goodreads

“Peg Tittle’s *What Happened to Tom* takes a four-decades-old thought experiment and develops it into a philosophical novella of extraordinary depth and imagination Part allegory, part suspense (perhaps horror) novel, part defense of bodily autonomy rights (especially women’s), Tittle’s book will give philosophers and the philosophically minded much to discuss.” Ron Cooper, *Hume’s Fork*

Sexist Shit that Pisses Me Off

“Woh. This book is freaking awesome and I demand a sequel.” Anonymous, barnesandnoble.com

“I recommend this book to both women and men. It will open your eyes to a lot of sexist—and archaic—behaviors.” Seregon, Goodreads

“Honestly, selling this in today’s climate is a daunting challenge—older women have grown weary, younger women don’t seem to care, or at least don’t really identify as feminists, men—forget that. All in all a sad state of affairs—sorry.” rejection letter from agent

Shit that Pisses Me Off

“I find Peg Tittle to be a passionate, stylistically-engaging writer with a sharp eye for the hypocritical aspects of our society.” George, Amazon

“Peg raises provocative questions: should people need some kind of license to have children? Should the court system use professional jurors? Many of her essays address the imbalance of power between men and women; some tackle business, sports, war, and the weather. She even explains why you’re not likely to see Peg Tittle at Canada’s version of an Occupy Wall Street demonstration. It’s all thought-provoking, and whether or not you’ll end up agreeing with her conclusions, her essays make for fascinating reading.” Erin O’Riordan

“This was funny and almost painfully accurate, pointing out so many things that most of us try NOT to notice, or wish we didn’t. Well written and amusing, I enjoyed this book immensely.” Melody Hewson

“ ... a pissed off kindred spirit who writes radioactive prose with a hint of sardonic wit Peg sets her sights on a subject with laser sharp accuracy then hurls words like missiles in her collection of 25 cogent essays on the foibles and hypocrisies of life Whether you agree or disagree with Peg’s position on the issues, *Shit that Pisses Me Off* will stick to your brain long after you’ve ingested every word—no thought evacuations here. Her writing is adept and titillating ... her razor sharp words will slice and dice the cerebral jugular. If you enjoy reading smart, witty essays that challenge the intellect, download a copy” Laura Salkin, thinkspin.com

“Not very long, but a really good read. The author is intelligent, and points out some great inconsistencies in common thinking and action may have been channeling some George Carlin in a few areas.” Briana Blair, Goodreads

“ ... thought-provoking, and at times, hilarious. I particularly loved ‘Bambi’s cousin is going to tear you apart.’ Definitely worth a read!” Nichole, Goodreads

“What she said!!! Pisses me off also! Funny, enjoyable and so right on!!!! Highly recommended.” Vic, indigo.ca

Critical Thinking: An Appeal to Reason

“This book is worth its weight in gold.” Daniel Millsap

“One of the books everyone should read. A lot of practical examples, clear and detailed sections, and tons of all kinds of logical fallacies analyzed under microscope that will give you a completely different way of looking to the everyday manipulations and will help you to avoid falling into the common traps. Highly recommended!” Alexander Antukh

“One of the best CT books I’ve read.” G. Baruch, Goodreads

“This is an excellent critical thinking text written by a clever and creative critical thinker. Her anthology *What If* is excellent too: the short readings are perfect for engaging philosophical issues in and out of the classroom.” Ernst Borgnorg

“Peg Tittle’s *Critical Thinking* is a welcome addition to a crowded field. Her presentations of the material are engaging, often presented in a conversational discussion with the reader or student. The text’s coverage of the material is wide-ranging. Newspaper items, snippets from *The Far Side*, personal anecdotes, emerging social and political debates, as well as LSAT sample questions are among the many tools Tittle employs to educate students on the elemental aspects of logic and critical thinking.”
Alexander E. Hooke, Professor of Philosophy, Stevenson University

What If?... Collected Thought Experiments in Philosophy

“Of all the collections of philosophical thought experiments I’ve read, this is by far the best. It is accessible, uses text from primary sources, and is very well edited. The final entry in the book— which I won’t spoil for you—was an instant favorite of mine.” Dominick Cancilla

“This is a really neat little book. It would be great to use in discussion-based philosophy courses, since the readings would be nice and short and to the point. This would probably work much better than the standard anthology of readings that are, for most students, incomprehensible.” Nathan Nobis, Morehouse College

Should Parents be Licensed? Debating the Issues

“This book has some provocative articles and asks some very uncomfortable questions” Jasmine Guha, Amazon

“This book was a great collection of essays from several viewpoints on the topic and gave me a lot of profound over-the-(TV-)dinner-(tray-)table conversations with my husband.” Lauren Cocilova, Goodreads

“You need a licence to drive a car, own a gun, or fish for trout. You don’t need a licence to raise a child. But maybe you should ... [This book] contains about two dozen essays by various experts, including psychologists, lawyers and sociologists” Ian Gillespie, *London Free Press*

“... But the reformers are right. Completely. Ethically. I agree with Joseph Fletcher, who notes, “It is depressing ... to realize that most people are accidents,” and with George Schedler, who states, “Society has a duty to ensure that infants are born free of avoidable defects. ... Traditionalists regard pregnancy and parenting as a natural right that should never be curtailed. But what’s the result of this laissez-faire attitude? Catastrophic suffering. Millions of children born disadvantaged, crippled in childhood, destroyed in adolescence. Procreation cannot be classified as a self-indulgent privilege—it needs to be viewed as a life-and-death responsibility” Abhimanyu Singh Rajput, Social Tikka

Ethical Issues in Business: Inquiries, Cases, and Readings

“Ethical Issues in Business is clear and user-friendly yet still rigorous throughout. It offers excellent coverage of basic ethical theory, critical thinking, and many contemporary issues such as whistleblowing, corporate social responsibility, and climate change. Tittle’s approach is not to tell students what to think but rather to get them to think—and to give them the tools to do so. This is the text I would pick for a business ethics course.” Kent Peacock, University of Lethbridge

“This text breathes fresh air into the study of business ethics; Tittle’s breezy, use-friendly style puts the lie to the impression that a business ethics text has to be boring.” Paul Vimitz, University of Lethbridge

“A superb introduction to ethics in business.” Steve Deery, *The Philosophers’ Magazine*

“Peg Tittle wants to make business students think about ethics. So she has published an extraordinarily useful book that teaches people to question and analyze key concepts Take profit, for example She also analyzes whistleblowing, advertising, product safety, employee rights, discrimination, management and union matters, business and the environment, the medical business, and ethical investing” Ellen Roseman, *The Toronto Star*

more at pegtittle.com

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You can do this, she told herself as she sprinted—well, as she ran as fast as she could—along the road toward the curve in the distance. Heart thundering, lungs heaving, she made it to the curve, rounded it, and saw an intersection in the distance. You can do this, she kept telling herself, as she kept moving, getting closer and closer to the intersection ... Yes, she was over sixty, just a tad over sixty, but she'd been running since she was thirteen, since she'd entered high school and discovered something called 'cross-country'. She'd done track in grades seven and eight, but— They ran through the forest! Or at least through the wooded parks on the edge of the city, which was, back then, the closest thing to forest she knew. She fell in love with it. The beauty. The quiet. The solitude. The rhythm. The distance. Between practices, she ran through her neighbourhood. Every day, further.

So she could do this. She'd been surprised to discover there wasn't a women's team at university, so she joined the men's team. But then discovered that women weren't allowed to run the long distances. It was the 70s. At all the cross-country meets, women did just three miles. Men did five. At the track meets, women couldn't run even the 5,000, let alone the 10,000; the longest event for them was the 3,000. But she kept running further, and further. On her own. She didn't know she was ready for a marathon in her late twenties. There was no internet. She couldn't just google. She'd thought she'd have to be running twenty miles several times a week. Which is what she did. Which is why she was always tearing this or that.

Even so, she told herself, now trotting along a sidewalk, you can do this. It wasn't until her forties that she'd discovered that a total of fifty miles a week was sufficient preparation as long as she ran something over ten miles once a week. And by her forties, she'd been doing that for almost twenty years. So she ran her first marathon. At forty-five. Finished in under four hours.

As she approached the intersection, she could feel her heart still pounding, her lungs still straining. Okay, so you don't have the cardiovascular anymore, and you definitely don't have the flexibility, you'll be the tin man for days, but you've still got the strength. And the stamina. Because even at sixty, she'd been walking ten to fifteen miles every day, through the forest behind her cabin. You just have to get to forest, she told herself, you just have to lose whatever vehicles will be following you, and then you can walk. She stopped briefly to read the street signs, got her bearings, and was relieved to find herself at the south end of the city. She headed left. She could cut through the Walmart parking lot, then it was just a short bit to Seymour, which was the first exit, if you were coming from the south. She was jogging now. Limping, actually. It had been years since she'd run on sidewalk, on pavement. She was going to have shin splints. For the rest of her life if she didn't get into forest soon. Scrub bush, at least.

But she would be. Soon. There was forest on both sides of the highway all the way from her cabin to North Bay. Ergo, she grinned, all the way from North Bay to her cabin. It was 80km by highway. Probably more if she stuck to the forested edges. She could do 20km a day. She'd be home in four days. She could find safe places to sleep along the way ... Thank god it wasn't winter. The bear would be hibernating, but there would be wolves, and coyotes had moved up from the south ... Though, now that she thought about it, they were unlikely to live, or hunt, this close to the highway.

A year ago, she would've just hitch-hiked. A year ago, she was stupid. Out of step. Behind the times. Now, she understood that there was a good chance that anyone who stopped to pick her up would report her. Unless it was a woman who stopped. But, she grimaced, it could be illegal for women to drive now. It suddenly occurred to her that an unescorted woman might attract attention. Especially a sixty-year-old woman who was running. Even if she *had* been dressed for it. She abruptly slowed to a walk, her knees screaming.

And then it occurred to her that she couldn't go home. That would be the first place they looked. Well, she could set up some sort of alarm system, prepare an escape route ... into the crawl space, maybe. No, wait! Sam had turned his little cottage into a year-round rental, then decided it was too

much trouble, to manage the renting of it. She still had the key he'd given her when she'd confessed that she often stopped at his place on her way back, having paddled the ten mile stretch of river past the end of the lake, to sit and watch the sunset. "Have a beer while you're here," he'd said. "Make yourself at home." Okay, she would, yes. She ventured a small smile.

You can do this, she told herself again.

It had happened so quickly. One day, she was walking along the dirt lane, as she did every day, along the fifty metres from her cabin to the path that led deep into the forest, dressed as she always was, sweatshirt over a tshirt, baggy cotton cargo pants, thick socks, and track shoes. She had a small pack belted around her waist, that held her ID, a small pad of paper and a pen, an alarm and, in case that didn't work, bear spray, and a flashlight if she did something stupid and took longer to get out. Bug spray in season. Earplugs for Thursdays when the gun club had their get-togethers, a shot every six seconds, echoing for miles and miles. Once when they'd started early, it had been sheer hell for the hour it took to get back inside her cabin, windows closed, music on.

She hadn't had to use the bear spray. A bear did catch her by surprise one day, as she no doubt did it, but it just growled and took off running. She'd also come across a momma bear and its two cubs, but they were far enough away that she noticed in time to stop. They were on the path ahead of her, the only way out, so she just stood there, patiently, to let them go where and when they wanted. Tassi had been so good, content to be held in her arms—they must've been upwind and too far away for her canine nose and eyes to notice them. After a while, she carried on, talking in a singsong voice to let Momma know where she was and, hopefully, to convey her harmlessness. That had always worked with the dogs who'd come charging at her on her long-distance runs. Back when.

She'd also met a wolf one day. A juvenile by the way it was moving, so easily. It had been trotting along the path toward her, oh what a wonderful day—she'd been thinking pretty much the same thing—and when they rounded the curve to find themselves suddenly face to face, they both came to a sudden and complete halt. Astonished. As for her, also delighted. The creature was absolutely gorgeous, its coat a mix of cream, tan, and chestnut. It considered her, then simply turned around and trotted back the way it had come.

The only other animal she'd come across—aside from the numerous, though decreasing numbers of, squirrels, rabbits, and grouse—was a young moose. Like the bear, it too had just taken off when it heard her.

The day it happened, she was a few feet from the path when a car coming down the hill pulled up next to her. Was a time she'd've waited, ready to be helpful, to offer directions, to tell the driver 'No, you can't get to the highway from here, it's a dead end, you have to go back—'

"Are you Kat Jones?" The uniformed man in the passenger seat had quickly gotten out to stand before her, blocking her way onto the path. He was young—that is to say, under forty—and clean-cut.

"Yes." So?

"Would you come with us, please?"

What? "Why?"

The uniformed man in the driver's seat was also out. And standing behind her.

"We've received reports."

This wasn't making any sense. "Reports of what?"

He flashed a badge. "You are hereby under arrest for Fraudulent Identity."

"Under arrest? For *what*?"

"Fraudulent Identity. Section 380(1) of the Criminal Code. Subsection 4(a). Gender Fraud."

The second one reached for her arm before she had time to process— Certainly before she had time to get out her bear spray.

"You're presenting as male," the first one explained, "when, in fact, you're female. That's fraud. And a criminal offence."

The second one pulled her arms behind her, bound her hands together with one of those black plastic zip ties she'd often used around her cabin, then forced her into the back seat. Just like that. Her world ended.

It hadn't even occurred to her to make a run for it.

She never did find out who had reported her. It could have been Chuck, who lived down the lane. Nancy's husband. When she'd left a print-out in their mailbox, informing them of the toxicity of the smoke that blew her way every time they burned their leaves—something they often did, forcing her inside—and there was no reason they couldn't simply rake them into a corner of their one-acre lot and leave them to decompose—which was actually better, ecologically, than burning them—he'd been enraged. He'd knocked on her door and when she'd opened it—foolish, yes—he'd stepped inside without invitation and proceeded to yell at her, thrusting out his massive ex-footballer chest and punctuating his words with a jabbing finger. When she'd tried to respond, to engage in a civil conversation, he'd screamed at her to “Just Shut Up and Listen!” and a few moments later concluded his tantrum by calling her a cunt.

Or it could have been Mike, the guy who owned the property across the cove. When he started cutting down the trees along the shoreline, she'd called the Ministry to ask whether there were any by-laws against that. So the next time he saw her, he too screamed at her. Gave her a shove and called her a bitch. And kicked Tassi.

Or it could have been Alfred. He'd wanted to hire her to clean his house; she'd declined. She already had a job, with a company in Princeton, writing logical reasoning and critical reading questions for the GRE. He hadn't known that. And why would he? It's not like she walked around proclaiming it to the 'hood, and no one had ever invited her to dinner or whatever. She didn't ... fit. He'd just assumed: she was a middle-aged woman, ergo.

Or it could have been Don, who owned the cottage two lots down from her and the empty lot next to her. She'd told him, thirty years ago, when she'd bought her cabin—a cabin on a lake in a forest!—that if he ever wanted to sell the empty lot, she'd buy it. The previous summer, she'd had occasion to speak to him because he kept letting his dog crash his way through her fence—admittedly a sorry affair of chicken wire strung from tree to tree—but it did the job, which was to keep Tassi safe inside—with the added bonus of being virtually invisible. His dog was big and young and unruly, whereas Tassi was relatively small and, by then, elderly. And although the dog's intent was to play, Tassi would've been hurt if Kat hadn't intervened. Three days after she'd asked Don—yes, with some vehemence—to keep his dog on his own property, a 'For Sale' appeared on the empty lot, and when she'd called to make an offer, he said he had no intention of *ever* selling it to *her*. She'd been anxious for weeks, knowing that she'd have to move, give up her little paradise, if someone bought the lot for a permanent residence. They'd be too close: her solitude would be forever ruined. Even if they'd bought it just for seasonal use ... If they had screaming kids or ATVs or snowmobiles or late night parties or used a generator instead of paying for an electrical hook-up ... The sign eventually disappeared, and a year later someone told her he'd had no intention of selling it; he'd just wanted to upset her.

Or it could have been the guy who'd called out at her from his fume-belching ATV, when she was picking up the litter along the trail—as she often did, partly just to do her bit to keep the trails clean, but, eventually, mainly because *she* liked it better *without* the beer cans and the fast food containers and the cigarette butts—that it was 'Good to see she was good for somethin'!' She hadn't understood the comment until it was explained it to her: the man had probably thought she was a lesbian and so, since she wasn't any good for sex ...

Yes, she lived in what she privately called 'a hostile neighbourhood.' But to be honest, she wasn't convinced it was just her neighbourhood. Men everywhere seemed to take offense when a woman spoke up, challenged them in some way. Or when she didn't at least *pretend* to be sexually available to them. Women weren't much better, either treating her like a kid, presumably because she wasn't

married with kids of her own, or treating her like she was, in some way, off-putting. She didn't understand it. And yes, she was hurt by it.

So yes, she'd become a hermit. At sixty, she'd had enough, quite enough, of her uneducated, thick-skulled, and downright dangerous neighbours. And as for the world beyond, she found kin online. Sites like *I Blame the Patriarchy* and *Feminist Current* became her community. They were frequented by intelligent women who offered insightful discussion. Women much like her, she imagined. Radfem, for the most part. Probably over forty, for the most part.

And she was content. To live so alone. Though, actually, she didn't live alone. Well, hadn't lived alone until just recently. Tassi, her sole and constant companion, the love of her life, had died after fourteen years of happy, fourteen years of ... sheer joy. A tumour had developed in her urethra. Malignant, aggressive, inoperable. Two months later, at the end of an absolutely wonderful day together, Kat had had her euthanized, to spare her the last stages of transitional cell carcinoma. And she was still ... convalescing.

Maybe that's why she hadn't really noticed the car until it had pulled up beside her.

"Where are you taking me?" she asked, after the initial shock had worn off. They were on the highway, heading north. The nearest police detachment was south, in Burks Falls. But at least they weren't headed to Barrie or Toronto, two and three hours away. Already her shoulder was hurting. She should have asked them to bind her hands in front rather than behind. Thirty years of kayaking and snow shovelling had done something rather permanent to her rotator cuff.

"North Bay. You'll appear before a Justice of the Peace by end of business today."

"And then? How do I get back home?"

The responded with silence. And maybe a hint of laughter.

An hour later, the officer behind the wheel pulled into an underground lot that led into to a secured entrance area. The other one helped her out of the back seat and, holding firmly onto her arm, then led her through one, then another, set of doors into what was obviously some sort of processing area. He handed some paperwork to the officer behind the counter, then left.

The processing officer took her photograph, fingerprints, and a DNA sample, then led her to an adjoining room that had benches along three walls.

"Have a seat," he said. "It may be a while."

"Wait—"

He turned.

"Can you undo these ties? Or at least bring them to the front?"

"Sorry, no can do."

"But—"

He locked the door behind him.

A few hours later, it looked like she'd be spending the night. Surely if her case hadn't been called by what she guessed was around five o'clock, it wouldn't be called until the next day.

"Excuse me," she called out to the officer who had relieved the day shift.

He looked up from the other side of the reception counter. It was the limit of his acknowledgement. Of her existence.

"Could you please undo these ties. I've lost almost all circulation, and by morning, you may have to amputate both arms. I'm serious."

He merely grunted. But he did snip the ties. She almost screamed as the blood rushed back into her arms, setting her nerves on fire.

She'd missed supper. But she wasn't hungry.

What she was, was tired. Dead tired. Her body wasn't used to this kind of stress. So when she stretched out on the bench, she actually fell asleep.

Next morning, she could barely move for the pain and stiffness in her neck, her shoulders, her hips.

But move she did, led from the holding cell, along several hallways, into an elevator (yes, thank you!) (though a few flights of stairs might have loosened her up a bit), up to the third floor. Down a hall to a row of chairs outside Courtroom #5.

"Wait here," she was told. "Your lawyer will come get you."

Her lawyer?

The Courthouse in North Bay was not terribly imposing. She'd driven by it several times. But it was, nevertheless, official, and after a while, an armed guard came out of the room.

"Ms. Jones?"

"Yes."

"Come with me, please."

She was led into the dead-quiet room, up the centre aisle, to one of the two tables facing the Judge. A young woman at the table, smartly dressed in an ivory skirt and tailored jacket over a pale pink blouse, glanced at her and nodded.

"All rise. Justice Richard Meyers presiding. Court is now in session."

The young woman stood, then pulled Kat to her feet beside her.

"The Court calls Katherine Elizabeth Jones."

Confused, Kat stayed on her feet. Beside, presumably, her lawyer.

"Cynthia Seder, Your Honour, representing Katherine Elizabeth Jones."

The Justice nodded, and the Clerk continued.

"Katherine Elizabeth Jones, you are charged with Gender Fraud, pursuant to The Criminal Code of Canada, Section 380(1), revised, Subsection 4(a). How do you plead?"

What? Already? She glanced over at the young woman. Who nodded again, ambiguously. But they hadn't had a chance to speak. Well, she supposed her plea didn't need any discussion.

"Not guilty."

The Justice looked up at her in surprise.

"Do you dispute the facts in evidence? To wit," he read the record of arrest, "that you were, *are*," he looked at her, pointedly, "wearing men's clothing, that you are not wearing make-up, that your hair is short and undone, that you are not wearing any jewelry, that you are unmarried, that you do not have any children, that you have had your breasts removed, that you have had your reproductive capacity nullified via tubal cauterization, and that you have pursued an advanced academic degree?"

She was stunned. How had he gotten all that information about her? And why? And when? It must have taken a while ... Which meant ...

"In Philosophy, no less."

And if she were a man, that advanced academic degree, in Philosophy no less, would be evidence in *favour* of—well, anything.

"No," she said, trying desperately to get up to speed, "I dispute the interpretation of the facts. Your Honour. I was, *am*, not intending to defraud anyone. I am not intending to deceive anyone about my identity." She stared at her lawyer. Her absolutely useless lawyer.

"You are female, is that correct?"

"Yes."

"Then absent intent to deceive, your appearance and demeanour would be feminine."

What?

“And it is not. The court orders six months treatment in a psychiatric facility.”

“Wait, *what?*”

The Judge banged his gavel, and the bailiff called the next case.

“I don’t understand,” Kat turned to the young woman, as two officers of the court approached her. “I’m being *committed*? Not just fined or ...”

“Conditions justifying involuntary commitment to a psychiatric facility include gender dysphoria,” she explained, “and gender fraud is considered conclusive evidence of gender dysphoria.”

What?

“Can’t we appeal? Prove my mental capacity?” Because she could surely do that. GRE and all that.

“That would apply in the case of danger to oneself or inability to care for oneself. But in the case of Gender Fraud, you’re considered a danger to others.”

What?

“How so?”

The young woman didn’t answer.

“Wait—” Kat said as one of the officers gripped her arm and began to lead her away.

“Trust me,” the young woman assured her, “you’d rather be incarcerated in a psychiatric facility than in a prison.”

“Are you sure?” Kat said, looking over her shoulder.

“We’ll appeal, of course, but ... that’ll take time. Good luck!”

What??

Kat was escorted—pulled and shoved actually, as her hands were zip-tied again, but at least in front this time—out of the room through a different doorway, into another elevator that descended one, two, three, four floors, then opened into an underground parking lot. This couldn’t be happening, she thought. When she was able to think at all.

She was forced into the back of a transport van. Two women sat on a bench along the left side of the van, their hands, similarly shackled, in their lap. Kat was directed to the bench along the right. The door was closed. And locked.

“Either one of you know what the fuck is going on?” Kat asked. Absurdly. Why would they know about her case?

One of the women was sobbing, the other looked drugged. Neither one responded.

Half an hour later, another woman was brought into the van. Then another. And another. Only one was able to speak, and she seemed as stunned as Kat.

Six was apparently maximum capacity. “That’s it!” she heard someone call out. The back panel of the van was slapped a couple times—why did guys do that?—and a minute later, it was moving. Presumably toward the psychiatric facility. What the fuck.