

In the narrow strand of space between the first piece of information and all the rest, thoughts rushed through Clarissa that could not be said aloud, not then, probably not ever. They came like the violent Nor'easters she'd known as a child in Maine, appearing without warning as she'd disconnected the phone for the third time in quick succession.

How could he have let this happen?

The initial call came from a reporter, and Clarissa hung up mid-sentence, telling herself there'd been a mistake.

He'd tricked her, Todd had. Tricked her into trusting him, even though she knew life was delicate beyond belief, and humans were flimsy, including those who seemed invincible.

The second call came from Bill Snyder, who opened by barely speaking at all, as if to prolong her last moments of unknowing, and then began carefully, each word padded by pauses, each phrase couched in ambiguity. She hung up on him also, but with less confidence.

Everything one counted on could vanish in a second; she'd understood that since childhood. A new narration wiping out personal history without a whisper of remorse. That's why, at base, she'd never married before. Been too smart for marriage.

The final call came from a baldly definitive FBI agent, speaking in a clipped but almost tender tone as she thought in stunned amazement, "The FBI, how odd is this?" She had no memory of hanging up on him, only of noticing at one point that she no longer pressed the receiver to her ear.

Why had she let herself willfully block out this transiency, fall in love, remake the boundaries of her life, and then redefine what it meant to trust the world? Because even as she'd worried aloud, she'd secretly relied on the conviction that he would stay safe.