

## CHAPTER TWO

Two days earlier, I showed up at the home of my eldest brother, Azam, in Merrick. It was early afternoon as I pulled up in a panic, and Azam wasn't home, but his wife was. I went inside and told my sister-in-law, Afshan, I just came over because I wasn't feeling too well, so I wanted to spend some time with my brother.

For the previous three weeks, I had been driving east from Merrick to Deer Park every fourth day in my 2000 Ford Explorer, spending a lot of money on gas. This time, I decided to go to my oldest brother's house and try to see if he could sort things out for me. My unemployment checks had stopped coming in three weeks ago, and I had very limited cash. On top of that, I'd received a notification from the DMV (Department of Motor Vehicles) that I had a lapse in my car insurance and needed either to turn in my license plate or cover the outstanding balance. I had very limited funds, and I had to show up at my brother's house after a very odd morning. I hadn't slept at all the night before.

That morning, my son's physical therapist, Laurel, came and was happy that we had a high chair for Ali, one I'd bought the night before with my brother, which he paid for. I felt the other one I'd ordered was taking too long, and she was complaining about us not having a high chair.

She put Ali in the high chair, and his feet weren't touching the bottom part of it; he was a little short, and the chair was a bit big for him. So, she asked me to bring out some books, and I brought her some old ones I'd bought throughout the years, as well as some new ones. From these, she picked out three books. The first one was *Ghost Beach*, a Goosebumps story by R.L. Stine, one of my childhood favourites. I actually had a huge collection of his books in the box I brought out.

She was joking when she asked, “You haven’t been there, have you?”

I chuckled but didn’t reply, so she picked up the second book, *The Time Traveller’s Wife*, by Audrey Niffenegger, an international bestseller I’d picked up several years ago because I found the title and back cover interesting; I’d never actually gotten around to reading it, though.

She made another funny comment. “Have you visited *The Time Traveller’s Wife* recently?”

“No, I haven’t,” I replied firmly.

“Well, you should.”

Obviously, she was joking, but I was taking it seriously in my mind. I correlated *The Time Traveller’s Wife* to Afshan and thought I should visit her sometime later that day.

The physical therapist then picked up the third book, *Make Money on Main Street*, by Philip A. Okun, a signed book I’d bought from a bookstore in Huntington, where the author spoke about it. She made some further funny comments about the third book as well, telling me I should use these books for the foundation on the high chair.

She set it all up, and I told her we were actually in a rush because my wife had a doctor’s appointment, so Laurel left early.

I told my wife I had a doctor’s appointment set up for her, so she should get herself and Ali ready, then we would go see her. It was around 11 AM when we drove to the doctor’s office. It wasn’t far; in fact, it was just next door to the gynaecologist I used to take my wife to before Ali was born. This was the first time I took her to this doctor’s office for a regular check-up.

We went in, and I told the doctor my wife hadn't been feeling well lately; she hadn't been talking much, had little interest in anything, and hadn't been doing much around the house. I also told her my wife had taken a depression test and it came back saying she had major depression and anhedonia. The doctor told me to step outside so she could speak to my wife privately and carry out a physical examination.

I did as she asked and stepped out with Ali and sat down in the waiting area. I had his car seat with me. I noticed a Pakistani man and Caucasian woman across the room, looking at me. I became paranoid about the man and affiliated him with my wife. It seemed as if he wanted to talk to me. He kept looking at me, and I glanced at him through my peripheral vision. The lady was also observing me, so I felt like I was being watched in that office.

At that point, the man actually got up and left, followed by the lady, raising more suspicion; then I remembered there was a back door. The doctor's office was on the first floor, with a reception area to the right and the waiting area to the left, with 7 or 8 chairs that formed an L shape. The office was across the room. The doctor was in her office at the back, and there were other rooms in the office to the left, and a bathroom to the right. Something stood out that time and hit me again later: there was also a back entrance to the doctor's office.

My suspicion and paranoia became stronger, so I turned to see what was happening at the reception, then wondered if I could go and check on my wife. I was getting a bit agitated, because I had to wait so long for the check-up.

A thought crossed my mind that maybe the lady and the Pakistani man were in the room while the check-up was going on and they were trying to conspire something against me. Maybe they wanted to come up with some kind of woman's rights or abuse case against me or were giving her something to utilize, like a recording device. I thought she would escape through

the back door and I'd never see her again.

These thoughts were going through my mind while I was waiting for my wife to come out of the room. I ended up walking up to the back with the baby seat in my hand, when I suddenly heard muffled talk. I tried to listen in on their conversation, but I couldn't hear anything. I went to knock on the door and heard the doctor's voice.

"We're almost done. You can come in in a minute."

"Okay," I replied.

I went to the waiting area and just sat there patiently until she called us in. Ultimately, I ended up going into the back office. My wife sat down on the right, and I sat on the left, while the doctor was sitting across from us.

She was talking about how we needed to get some kind of imaging done for my wife, so we could see further what was happening. She gave us a note and referred us to a neurologist, with whom we were going to follow up later.

My wife looked at me and asked, "This is what you wanted, right?"

I didn't understand what she meant, so I replied, "What are you talking about?"

"You wanted me to see a doctor, and now they're going to treat me."

As we left the doctor's office, a lot of thoughts raced through my mind. We got in the car and left the office. A couple hours later, we were in a McDonald's parking lot, eating fish filet sandwiches I'd bought for my wife and myself for lunch. I didn't really want to go back home, but I didn't have much of a choice. I saw a car pull up behind me, driven by a Pakistani man; he was with his family, I guessed. He pulled up at the same time I did, and when I got

out, he got out as well. I was wondering whether it was the same person I saw earlier at the doctor's office. I'm sure it was someone else, but in my mind I thought it was the same person, conspiring with my wife against me.

I made a connection between her and a political party in Pakistan, thinking it might be some kind of plan against me. I made this connection because some things had happened in the past—particularly a politician showing up on my wedding day in the reception hall, coming with gunmen and armed with bodyguards.

He came up to me and said, "Make sure to take care of our daughter."

"You don't have to tell me that," was my response to him.

I found him quite annoying. When I left Pakistan after we got married, my wife was still in Pakistan, but I was interrogated for several hours at JFK Airport because they thought I had some connection to this political party in Pakistan, which I denied. They showed me pictures of some guests at my wedding, but I told them I neither recognized nor remembered seeing them. I thought this political party was connected to my wife, trying to plan something against me. My paranoia was definitely still there, even on that day.

So when the man got out of his car, I got out as well, but my wife still stayed in the car because I didn't turn the engine off. I got back in the car and left, and that was when I showed up at Azam's house. It's about a five-minute drive between my house and his. He was still at work, but Afshan welcomed us and was very happy that my son came along as well, as she loved playing with him.

A little later, my brother came home and was also happy I'd come over. I called up my mom to tell her I was at his house and was going to be staying over that night. She was worried and

asked if I was OK. She also wanted to talk to my brother, who told her she didn't need to worry about me because I was fine; I just wanted to spend some time with him, that was all. He told her that since I was with him, I would be fine.

Prior to that call, I showed him the referral the doctor gave for my wife.

He looked at it and smiled. "Good job."

There had been some things that happened between me, my wife, and my family that led to him reacting in such a way, but he was happy I had documented evidence that something was wrong with my wife. He smiled and made a copy of the referral.

It was getting late in the afternoon, so I called *Ammi* ("mother" in Urdu). I told her we were going to watch TV, then the next day we would sort things out. I told my brother about my insurance lapse, my money being tight, and the issue with my unemployment checks. He told me he was off the following day and that we'd sort it out then.

"Let's watch some movies and enjoy the rest of the evening, and we'll take it from there," he said, relaxed.

When I came out of his bedroom, my wife, Mariam, was in the living room with Ali, our son.

"When are we going home?" she asked me.

"We aren't going home; we're staying over."

She gave me an odd look and said, "Ali needs his diapers, baby formula, milk, and other things."

I told her it was fine, I was going to get them with my brother. She gave me another odd look; she really didn't want to stay over.

“Mariam, what`s wrong? You can stay in the other bedroom, and my kids can sleep with me. Azam will sleep in the living room, and Adam will sleep in our bedroom. I can sleep with the kids, and you can sleep with Ali on the other bed,” my sister-in-law insisted, but my wife looked at me and told me again to get the stuff because Ali needed to be fed, so I asked my brother to come with me.

It was getting late. My brother was driving as I talked gibberish, but it made sense to him for some reason. It was coherent – it wasn’t like I made no sense – but it was paranoid talk and other stuff going on in my mind. He kept reassuring me it was going to be fine, I should relax, I shouldn’t be tense, etc.

I ended up telling him I hadn’t shaved for several days. He said when we got back home, he would take out a razor I could use.

“It`s not a big deal,” he said. “People don’t shave for several days.”

When we got back to the house, I went upstairs. The entrance to my house is a bit strange. When you enter, there is the landlady`s door to the right, with stairs leading up to our second floor apartment.

When we opened the door and went upstairs, we were in a rush, so my brother left the front door open, thinking it was going to be a quick visit, as we were there just to pick up a few things. My brother was standing next to our door on the second floor while I was packing a few things, when the landlady came out and asked where I was, as well as Mariam.

“Don’t worry, he`s with me. We’re here to pick up some things,” my brother replied, but she kept asking where Mariam was, where I was going, so on and so forth. So my brother told her again that we were all fine and were just there to pick up some things.

“Okay,” she said and closed her door.

I was distracted by listening to their conversation and hadn't gathered anything, so I asked my brother to come inside and have a look at some things we had in the kitchen.

I told him to look at the gallons of water sitting on the countertop.

“Look at these gallons. This is what Ali and I have been drinking,” I told him, pointing to one of the gallons my wife had given me, which had black writing in Urdu on it.

There was another gallon of water on the dining table, and I told him that was what *Ammi* had given me to drink. It also had something written on it in blue ink, in Urdu. It was some kind of holy water.

He looked at them and said, “Okay.”

I was trying to imply something superstitious, but it seemed as if he was getting angry.

I told him my wife used the gallon with the black Urdu writing to make the baby formula as well.

I didn't know how to read or write Urdu, so I didn't know what the writing said, but it was water for me and Ali my wife had.

He told me not to take that one, but instead take one that was sealed, so I took the one he said, along with the baby formula, a bag of diapers, and my son's seizure medication before we left.

When we got back to my brother's house, my wife looked curiously at what we'd brought and said, “You forgot to bring the water.”

“No, it`s right here,” my brother replied, showing her the gallon.

She saw the water, so this seemed odd to me and my brother. I made the connection that what I was talking about was true.

She said it was OK and went into the bedroom, where she settled down with Ali and gave him his medication. She then fed him and changed his diapers.

It was 7 PM, but she stayed in her room without dinner, though she hadn`t eaten since lunch.

“Take a shower. I`ll give you fresh clothes, a clean pair of sleeping pants, and a T-shirt,” my brother instructed.

I went to the bathroom and took a shower for a very long time, because I felt so dirty and believed I needed to cleanse myself. I was about to shave, but I suddenly stopped and thought the razor was there for a reason, so I decided not to shave, but instead to keep it in my pocket so I could protect myself if someone attacked me or the Devil incarnated and came to me.

“Why didn`t you shave?” my brother asked as soon as I came out of the shower.

“I wasn`t able to,” I replied.

“But you took a long time.”

I thought we were talking in some kind of a code language.

“Don`t worry, I have the razor blade with me,” I assured.

He looked at me and asked if I really had the razor blade with me, but I didn`t respond.

He finally said, “Dinner is getting cold. I was waiting for you.”

We sat down and ate a little bit, but the whole setting seemed odd, because my brother left the table nearly as soon as we sat down and my sister-in-law was making bread while I was sitting at the table eating. As soon as she put the bread down in front of me, I cut it into four pieces and ate like I hadn't eaten in weeks. I did this for a few other rounds of bread brought before me.

My brother was looking at me in a strange way and may have thought I was just hungry, so he asked, "Do you want more bread?"

At that point, I realized how much I ate and told him I was full now and didn't want any more bread, but my sister-in-law insisted she could make more if I was still hungry. My brother gave me his whole wheat bread as well, and after a few pieces I told them I was really full now and she didn't have to make any more. After that, I got up and went to sit in the living room while he was talking to his wife.

Soon, he joined me and told me we should watch the new Batman movie, "The Dark Knight Rises". I paid close attention to every detail but only watched it for about ten minutes, up until the part where Catwoman stole the necklace from Bruce Wayne. I was constantly talking and making a psychological analysis of it, thinking there was a hidden message for me.

"Adam, I think this movie is a little too much for you right now. Let's watch something else," my brother said at that point.

He changed over to the new James Bond movie, "Skyfall". We started watching it, but I wasn't interested because it was a spy movie, and I wasn't in the right mindset. Plus, it wasn't the right time for that. I was overanalysing it as well, thinking it also had a message for me.

I got up and sat in the dining room, which was across the living room. I stayed there for a

while, quiet, feeling a bit insulted by my brother`s previous comment about the movie being too much for me. My brother then told me the movie was stupid, so he turned it off, saying he had had a long day at work and was going to bed. He told me I should sleep, too.

I went to his bedroom and started to look around. I noticed the time he`d set was different in each and every room; the living room clock was 30 minutes ahead, the one on the oven also by a couple minutes. Only the bedroom clock was on time. Due to the differences in time in his house, I made a connection that my brother was the Time Traveller and my sister-in-law was the Time Traveller`s Wife, from the book from before.

I looked at the bedroom clock and saw it was only 7:30 PM. I thought it was much later than that. I looked at the pictures he had of his wife and kids on the dresser. He kept them organized, on the middle part of the dresser. I walked up to his desk, where I found three different piles of things he needed to attend to. I took a mental note of everything. One pile consisted of letters that had been sent to our old address, where we used to live before with him and *Ammi*. The letters were unopened, and I left them like that. I also noticed he`d set up a separate pile on the side for the copy of the doctor`s referral.

I lay down in bed, and after some time my brother came in, asking me why I wasn`t sleeping, telling me I should go to sleep, because it was very important for me to get rest. He also told me I shouldn`t worry, because the next day we would get to the things I needed to do. He also made a comment about my wife that made me paranoid. He said I shouldn`t worry about her, because whatever she was planning to do, even if she was recording all our conversations, nothing would happen. He was generalizing, but I was taking it literally. He told me again to go to sleep, so I tried. I tried very hard, but I couldn`t sleep.

I went out of the bedroom after about an hour, and my brother was sleeping at that time. I

looked at the clock, and although it said the time was 9:30 PM, it was actually only 9 PM. I figured, *He's always on time, so he sets that clock half an hour ahead.* I lay down next to him and tried to sleep. Several hours went by, then his wife came to turn off the light in the dining area and I wasn't able to keep track of time anymore, after which I eventually dozed off.

My brother woke me up and asked what I was doing there; he was angry, surprised that I was sleeping next to him. I told him I was sleeping, and he asked what time it was. I told him I didn't know, and he became very irritated, telling me it was really important for him to get enough sleep. I told him I was sleeping there because I wasn't able to sleep in the bedroom. He was very angry and told me to sleep there while he went to sleep in the bedroom. It was at that point the phone rang; my mother wanted to talk to him about me.

"He's acting very strange. I'm going to wake up in the morning and sort things out for him, but I have to work tomorrow, so I can't spend all my time with him."

He also asked my mother why she was calling at 2 AM, and she told him she was worried. My brother then told her I wasn't sleeping. Embarrassed, I told them I was sleeping.

He turned the lights on in the dining area as he told our mom, "Please don't call until I get up in the morning. I need to sleep; I'm very tired." He then dropped the phone and went over to the bedroom.

I continued talking to my mother for another 5-10 minutes and told her I was sleeping, but he must have thought I was sleeping in the bedroom and was surprised and irritated when he realized I was next to him. I also told her I was okay and was in fact going back to sleep, then hung up.

*I definitely won't be able to sleep now,* I said to myself.

I was in the living room and felt unsafe, constantly sensing danger and on high alert. I started to hear helicopter noises, saw lights flashing around me, and felt as if someone came into the living room through the entrance of my brother`s house.

I started reciting, *“Astaghfirullah”* and *“Ayat-ul-Kursi”* to myself.

At some point, my wife came from the bedroom, and I was surprised to see her. According to the living room clock, it was past 3:30 AM.

“You haven`t slept?” I asked her.

“No. Adam, I`m very worried about what`s going on,” she replied.

“Don`t worry, go to sleep. Everything will be fine tomorrow,” I replied, but I thought maybe this wasn`t my wife, but rather the Devil.

She sat down next to me and I comforted her, telling her everything was going to be okay, but at the same time I felt like I was being deceived, so I put my hand in my pocket, touching the razor blade, realizing it had actually cut the right side of my body throughout the night.

I asked her again to go to sleep, because I couldn`t be bothered at that time; I really needed to go back to sleep. I didn`t tell her I was seeing lights and hearing noises and thought someone came up the stairs. I didn`t trust her; I didn`t even think she really came out of the bedroom. She left, and I didn`t hear the noises or see the lights till several hours later. When they came back again, I started to panic, lying down on the floor, frozen for the rest of the night.

My brother, sister-in-law, and the kids got up for school and morning prayers, then my brother came to turn on the lights in the living room. He told me to go to the room and sleep, but I opened my eyes and told him it was okay; I`d gotten enough sleep. I was relieved that my

brother had time to turn on the lights and it was close to dawn, so the panic went away; but, I hadn't slept most of the night.

I got up, and a little later my wife came out as well. We had breakfast with my brother in the kitchen, and my wife and sister-in-law had breakfast in the dining area together with my nieces and nephew. They went off to school, and my wife went back to the bedroom with Ali.

My brother called the DMV and insurance company for me, and my insurance got reinstated retroactive to the day it had lapsed. Then I told him my driver's licence had been suspended 6 months ago because I didn't pay for a ticket, and I'd gotten a letter for that also.

He looked at me, irritated, and said, "We'll have to go to DMV to get your abstract and see how to pay for it to get your license reinstated, but you can't drive until that's sorted out, because if you're driving with a suspended license, they could arrest you."

I told him I wouldn't drive, but I had to go home that night, because he had work the next day and I didn't want to stay there too long. He said it was OK, as it was close by, so he would drive his car, and I could just follow him. After that, the morning went by very quickly.

It was 2:30 PM when he said he was going to get the kids and I should sit tight and wait for him to come back without causing any scenes. He said this because after we sorted things out, I went into the bedroom, where my wife and sister-in-law were, and asked what my wife was doing all night, who she'd talked to. There were two beds set up in the room for my niece and nephew, with a side table in the middle, and she didn't say anything. I asked her what was in the drawer. She said there was nothing in it and that she didn't know. I told her she was hiding something, and my brother was observing the scene from behind me.

Afshan sat on the other bed while we had a conversation about suspicion.

“You were up all night, talking to someone. Do you have another phone?” I asked my wife.

My sister-in-law replied, “Adam, what are you talking about? She was up all night saying prayers. She didn’t talk to anyone.”

Then my brother asked her, “Why are you getting in the middle of this? Can you let them talk? Why are you interrupting him?”

I told my sister-in-law to open the drawer. There were three bags in it, all of them belonging to my sister-in-law.

“What are in these bags?” I asked my wife.

“I don’t know. These aren’t my bags; these are Afshan’s bags,” she replied.

“Open them up,” I demanded, wanting to know what was in them.

She said what I was asking wasn’t nice, then she asked why was I demanding her to open someone else’s bags.

“No, it’s okay, you can open them. I have nothing in them anyway,” my sister-in-law consented.

I asked her if she could open them for me, and she agreed. She opened one bag, and there was nothing inside. The second one was the same. She made me look inside it, and I checked the pockets, then she gave me the third one. I thought she was expecting something to be inside, but there was nothing there either. I then left the room with my brother. That was the scenario my brother had tried to warn me about, to sit tight and not cause any scenes.

Ali was in the bedroom, my 3-year-old nephew, Hassan, was running around, and I was

sitting at the dining table, waiting for something to happen. I started observing the window shades, noticing how there was a big “X” on the window from tape that had been peeled off. I pulled up the shade to look at it, then looked out the window. I pulled up the other shades as well.

Suddenly, I heard police sirens in the background, followed by the sound of the doorbell, which made me panic. My sister-in-law came out and asked who was there. I told her it was the police, but she said it wasn't them; it was the kids coming back from school. She opened the door, and the kids came in and went upstairs. I was on high alert, panicking and telling her they were there to arrest me or interrogate me for my suspended license. I asked her if there was anyone else at the door, or if it was only the kids.

“Yeah, it's just them. Why are you so worried?” she asked.

I asked her where Azam was, and she told me I shouldn't worry, he would be there any minute. With growing suspicion, I grabbed one of my nieces and went to the window, looking outside, holding her in my arms. I saw one of the neighbours outside. His dog was barking. I told my niece it was going to be OK, even if the police were there. Then hearing the doorbell again, I ran there with her still in my arms, through the dining area. She started to panic, too, and when she let go of me, she ended up hitting her head on the wall.

I told her I was sorry and got distracted as I picked her up. I asked her if she was okay, telling her I didn't mean to do that. My brother came in and asked what was going on and what had happened. My sister-in-law told him I thought the police were there and started panicking. He took his daughter in his arms and asked her if she was okay, and when she said she was, he told his wife to take the kids into the room.

When he sat down to talk to me in the dining room, I asked him, “Can we go out for a little

bit?”

He replied, “Sure, let`s go.”

I got in his car, and he started driving. Our old house wasn`t far, so he drove to the back alley, then we started having a conversation. He asked me if I remembered what happened there, and I told him I did; we had a lot of memories there.

“Yeah, definitely. A lot of memories,” he said.

“There were a lot of good memories, but a lot of bad memories as well,” I added, and he agreed. “I have to tell you something...when we used to live here, I started smoking cigarettes,” I confessed.

“Yeah, I know you started smoking when we were stressed out. Around five to six years ago, right?”

“Yeah, around that time. It was when your case was going on.” I was referring to my brother`s case, which he had 6-7 years ago. I`d made a comment about it last night as well, congratulating him that it was over.

“Oh yeah, but that`s over now, and I forgot about it, so why do you keep bringing it up? I`ve forgotten about it.”

“You know what? I need a cigarette now,” I said.

He got angry and told me, “If you want to have a cigarette, you can get out and have one, but I`m going to leave, and you`d have to walk back to your house.”

He said he would drop off my wife and Ali at my place, but he wasn`t going to be a part of the smoking.

“Why are you saying that? Let`s just go home,” I replied.

It was around 4-4:30 PM when we arrived back at my brother`s house. I told him I had to go home, and he said it was okay; he was going to pack me some food and I should get ready to leave. The sun was setting and the evening had started to settle in when I gathered the bags he`d packed, including fruits, nuts, and some other things, too. My sister-in-law put the food into containers, placing them in plastic bags.

My wife, Ali, and I were ready, and we had his formula and medication packed up. My wife had her handbag with her. I picked up the bags they`d packed and was getting ready to leave, but then I suddenly put them back down.

“I`m going to throw it out,” I told my brother.

“So do it. Why are you telling me?” Azam replied.

“What are you throwing out?” my sister-in-law asked.

He pointed to a bag that had spoiled fruits in it, rotten bananas, a day-old apple, and orange peels, all packed for me to take, then he asked me why I wasn`t throwing out that one as well. I took it and threw it out. I then took out the pack of cigarettes I had in my pocket and threw them out as well.

“What was that?” Afshan asked, but my brother told her not to ask so many questions. He also told her I just had to throw some things out and she shouldn`t worry.

“I have to throw this out as well,” I added, taking the razor out of my pocket.

My sister-in-law looked at me as if I was very strange.

I got in my truck, then Mariam sat in the back with Ali, who was in his car seat. I didn't know how to get home, so I got out and asked my brother if I could follow him to my house. He said it was fine with him, but I should keep some distance.

I followed him to my house, and when we got there I asked, "You do remember what I told you when I came over, right?"

"I remember, but you'll be fine. Just go and get some sleep."

"What did I say?" I insisted.

"You said, 'I don't feel safe at home.'"

"Yeah, I don't."

"Well, this is your home; nothing's going to happen to you. Just lay down on the couch and sleep."

I lay down in the same clothes I was wearing, then he asked my wife if she had any other clothes I could wear.

"Yeah, I do," she said, bringing out the clothes I wore the morning after our wedding.

Being skeptical, I refused to wear them, so my brother told her not to worry about the clothes, but to get me a pillow instead. She did as he asked, and he placed the pillow under my head and said, "Get some rest. When you don't get sleep, your mind starts losing control. We got some work done today; the next couple of days, we'll get the other things sorted out, too." He did his best to reassure me. He then turned to my wife and said, "Just let him sleep tonight, don't talk to him about anything. Don't do anything, okay?"

He closed the door and left. A few minutes later, Mariam locked the door and came up to me and said, “Adam, we need to talk.”

That was when I got up.