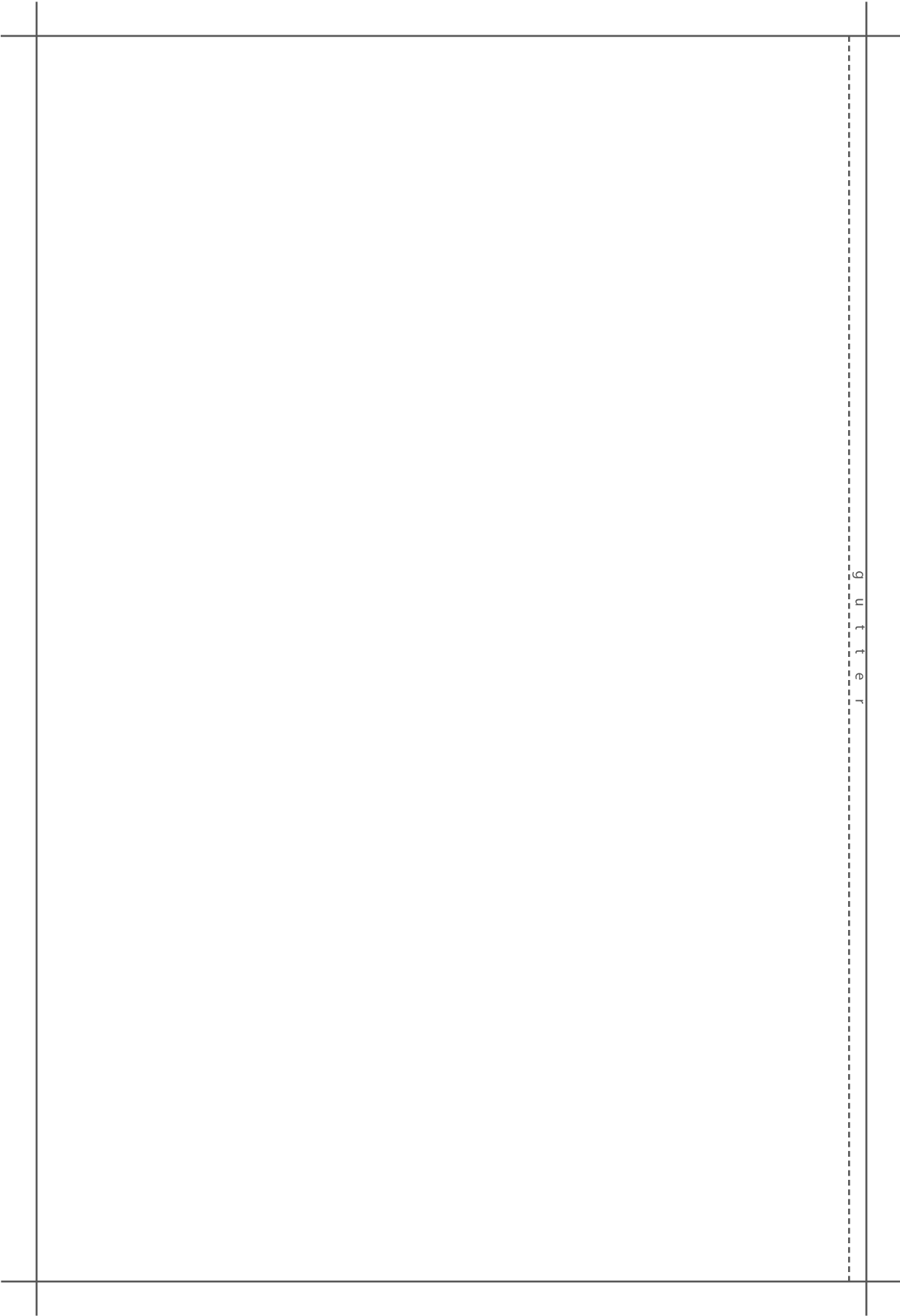


# Luggage By Kroger

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Luggage By Kroger  
A True Crime Memoir

*Gary Taylor*

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iUniverse, Inc.  
New York Bloomington

**Luggage By Kroger**  
**A True Crime Memoir**

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## Dedication

This memoir is first for my descendants, because they should have an accurate record of these events.

It is second for all those folks over the years who kept me out too late in bars demanding I tell it again with more details.

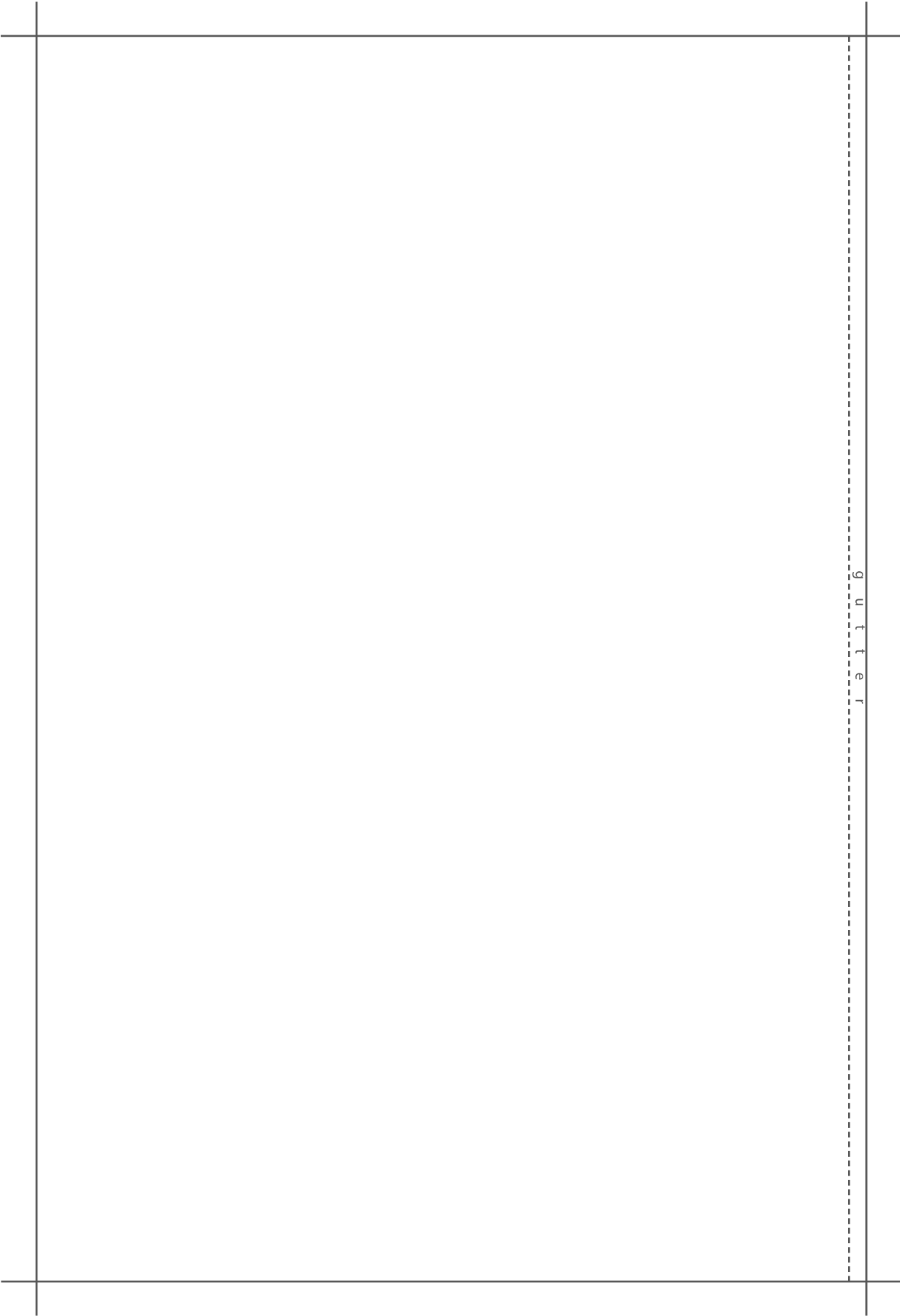
And third, it is also for anyone else who just enjoys a good yarn.

*"I'd rather laugh with the sinners than cry with the saints."*

—Billy Joel

*"I don't care how beautiful she is. Somebody, somewhere is sick of her shit."*

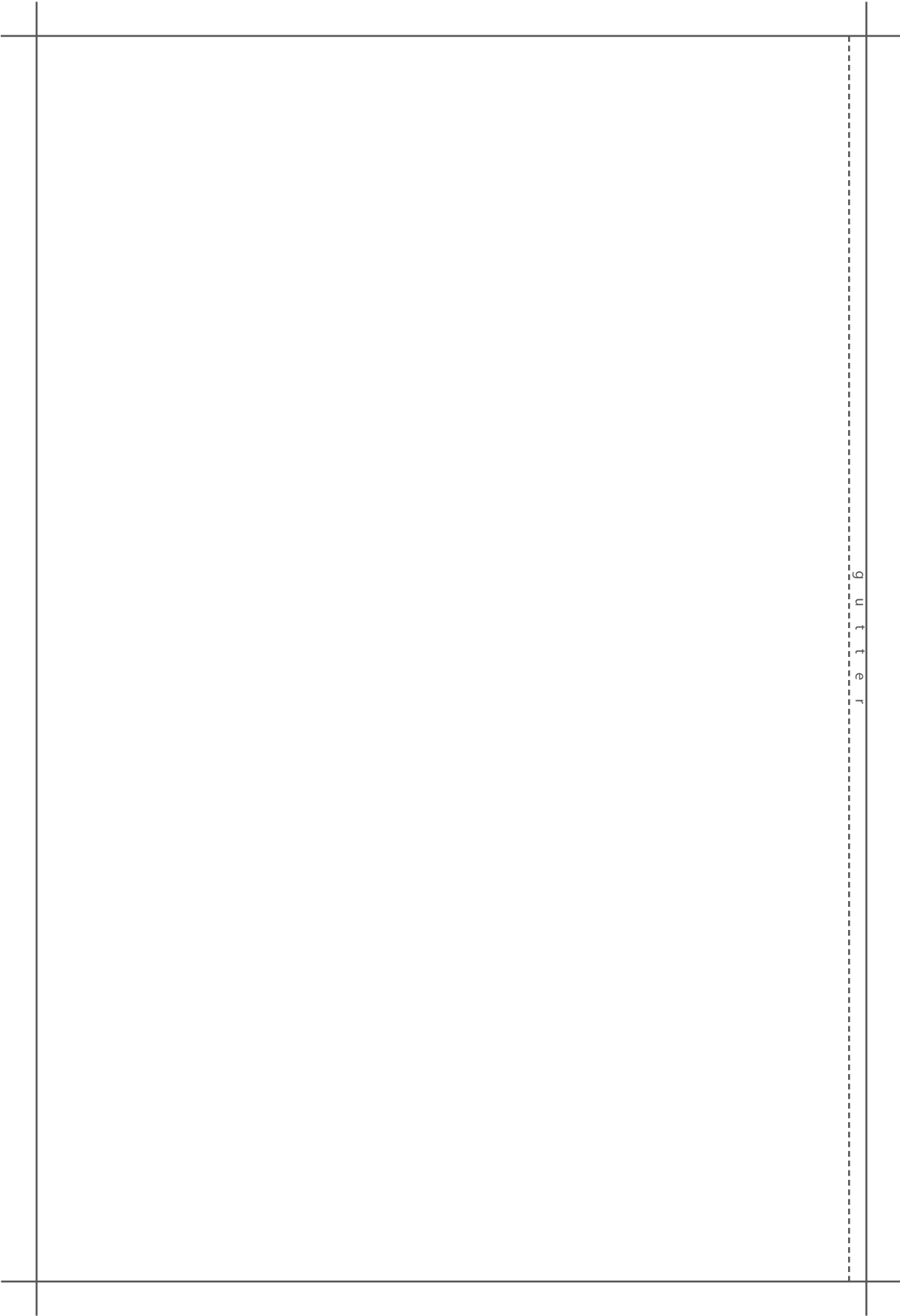
—Anonymous graffiti on the men's restroom wall of Rudyard's Pub in Houston



## Author's Pledge

This is a work of non-fiction. I solemnly affirm that the events in this memoir are all true to the best of my recollection and verified by numerous legal documents. Much of the dialogue comes from trial transcripts and depositions. Other conversations have been reconstructed from memory. But this was not difficult. The reader will quickly realize that most of these conversations should have been unforgettable.

In addition, I want to emphasize my good faith and honest effort to protect the personal privacy of everyone mentioned in this book. To accomplish that goal, I have referred to many acquaintances by first names or nicknames only and have created first name pseudonyms for others in at least four instances. Only one of those involves a character central to my story. Wherever I considered acquaintances to be public figures I have identified them by their complete names. In my own case I have held nothing back. To successfully tell my story, however, I have had to include many instances where it intersected with the lives of others. I have worked diligently to include only information necessary to explain their influence upon me. If I caused anyone pain, I would apologize in advance to those who deserve their privacy. To public figures who feel they have been maligned, however, I will just invite them to set the record straight when they produce memoirs of their own.



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## Prologue: Once upon a time in Houston...

“OK, Gary, let’s hear this famous Texas fatal attraction story.”

It was February of 2001, and I was sitting around the bar in the Singapore Cricket Club, sharing drinks with some British and Australian expatriates during a work assignment in the Far East. One of my colleagues had heard about my “Texas fatal attraction story” from someone in the states and now wanted to know more. Although the life-changing events of my Texas story had occurred twenty years earlier and more than eight thousand miles away, my audience appeared as eager to hear about them as if they had happened the day before in their backyard.

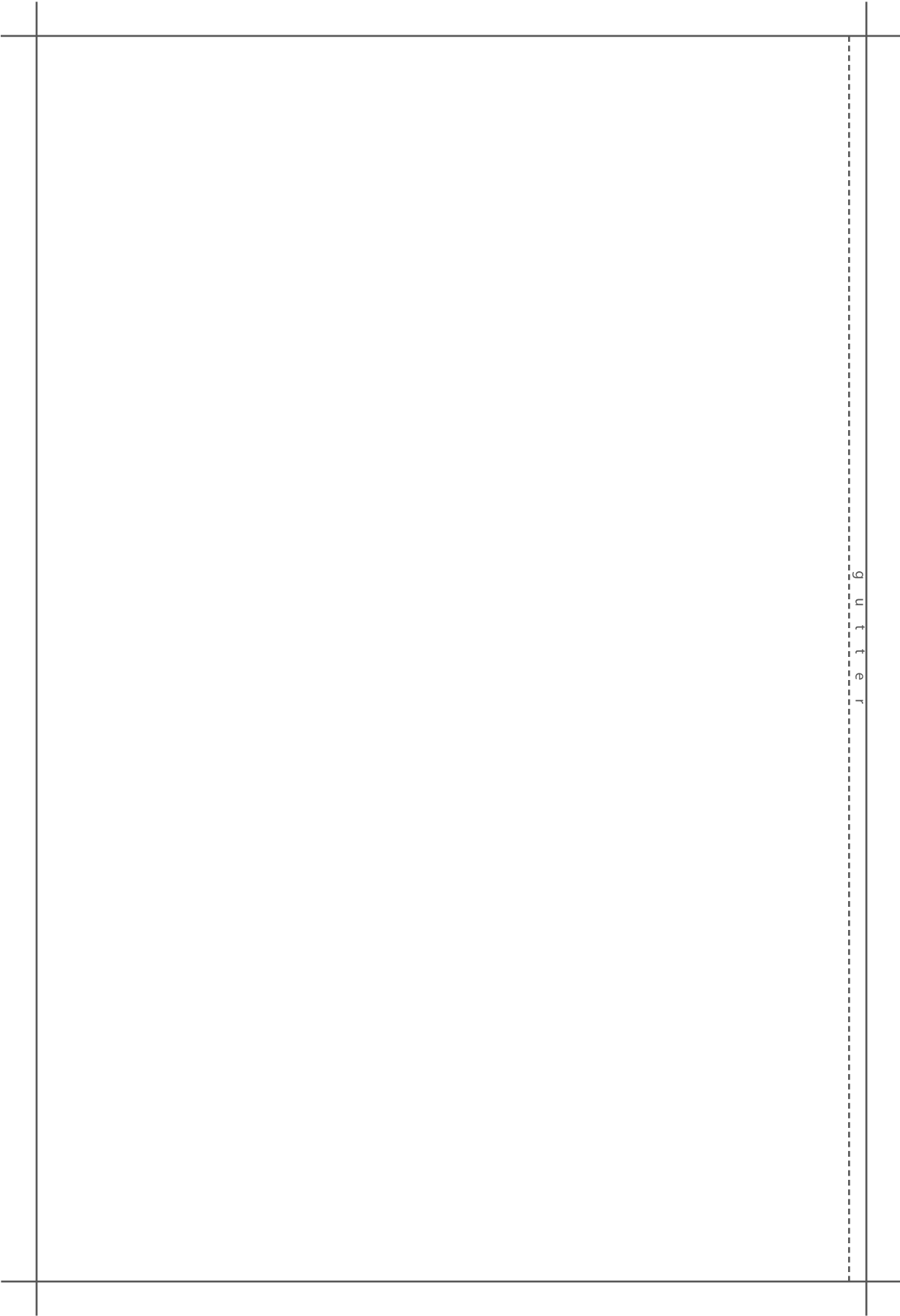
And why not? It was a yarn I had recounted many times since 1980 with drinking buddies all over the world. It was a true tale about murder and adultery. It was a story dramatic enough to have been twice optioned by Hollywood and aired three times on TV in documentaries. It was a story that had made me a guest on a dozen talk shows from Oprah Winfrey to Regis Philbin, where I discussed the dangers of obsessive relationships and showed my wounds as the poster boy for true-life fatal attractions. It was a story engaging enough to have been reported in magazines and newspapers on several occasions since it occurred, most recently the year before. It was a story driven by an unpredictable and classically manipulative femme fatale who could have been dispatched straight from central casting for a Bogart flick. It was a story with universal appeal that touched a wide range of issues central to the human condition: survival and redemption; love and lust; second chances ignored and embraced; trust and betrayal; weakness and

strength; the futility of violence as a solution in life; the limits of ambition; the boundaries of trust; fatherhood; and, the dilemma of moral ambiguity.

It was a story I never minded telling. It was a story that happened to me. And I began the way I always had in the past.

“I am basically just an ordinary guy,” I said. “But once upon a time, I had a truly extraordinary year. So, if you want to hear about that, let’s order another round and keep ’em coming. It may take a little while.”

Part One:  
The Widow Wore Red



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# ONE

January 15, 1979

When Houston homicide detectives arrived at the southwest Houston townhome of anesthesiologist George Tedesco, they found patrolmen guarding a gruesome scene in the garage. The Argentine doctor's nursing staff at St. Joseph Hospital had asked police to check Tedesco's home because he failed to show up for a surgery the week before. Arriving there, the police found blood seeping from under the garage door and drag marks leading to his body in the back. A metal pipe wrapped in a rag lay beside him on the concrete floor, and police surmised it had been used to bash his skull. Repeated blows had splintered the bone, crushed his right eye, broken his nose, and knocked out several teeth. They started trying to solve the crime.

At first, theft of the thirty-year-old doctor's missing silver Corvette appeared a possible motive for the mayhem. But the sheer viciousness of the attack made that seem like overkill. Instead, police already knew that Tedesco had spent the last year embroiled in a messy and unusual common law divorce case that seemed bizarre for those days in the late 1970s. In fact, trial of that divorce had been scheduled for that very day—January 15, 1979. They decided to focus on it as a potential cause. But they never realized things could get even more strange. The circus was just opening its doors.

Dictionaries define a "femme fatale" as a "calculating woman of dubious ethics," and Tedesco's adversary in the divorce action was an attractive, blonde thirty-two-year-old criminal defense attorney already building such an image

around the Harris County Courthouse. Her name was Catherine Mehaffey, and she had launched the divorce action after living with Tedesco for just three months. Long before words like “palimony” and “stalking” joined our legal vocabularies, Catherine appeared to be pioneering those concepts by deeds in Houston. Asserting herself as Tedesco’s common-law wife under Texas laws of the time, she had sued him for half of his assets, claiming all sorts of abuse. Tedesco chose to resist, hiring a lawyer to challenge Catherine’s claims and stubbornly refusing her invitation for a quick payoff that might spare them the embarrassment of court.

So she had spent the year before his death making him miserable. Oh, the cops were well aware of the Tedesco divorce. He had sought their help on several occasions, claiming she had followed and spied on him. He even accused her of orchestrating a burglary at his townhouse late in 1978. His attorney had instructed him to tape all phone conversations with her in an effort to document her threatening activities. In those days, however, even a pint-sized five-foot-six-inch, 166-pound guy like Tedesco generated little sympathy when he came sniveling around the police substations seeking protection from a woman. They couldn’t arrest her for making him nervous. She had committed no crime. Maybe he should just grow a pair of balls and handle it himself. After all, what’s that little lady going to do? Kill him?

After finding him in that pool of blood, however, they began to question those initial reactions to his pleas. They wondered if maybe they hadn’t been too hasty with their macho dismissal of Tedesco’s complaints. Catherine Mehaffey instantly took an express elevator ride straight to the top of their “interesting persons” list within minutes after the homicide investigation began. And discovery of a taped conversation between them from just a couple of days before—possibly on the day of his death—only made detectives more anxious to question her.

“Hello,” he answered as that tape began.

Her voice replied: “George? We need to talk.”

He continued: “Yes, Catherine, we certainly do. We need more than that. You need to bring back my stuff. Those artifacts are priceless and your people stole it all.”

Suddenly, the tape depicted a change of tone for her, a snarl and an admission of her stalking: “I saw you with that whore, that slut. Who was she?”

Obviously familiar with her tactics and, of course, aware he was creating a tape that might some day surface in a courtroom, Tedesco remained emotionless and focused, refusing to even acknowledge her question about a recent date where she had followed him. Instead, he quietly asked: “Are you returning the art?”

Then her voice shifted to an overdramatic whine with dialogue straight from a soap opera: “Why do you do these things? You’ve ripped the heart right out of my chest and stomped on it. Why can’t we end this like adults?”

He stood his ground and candidly asked: “Why did you have to steal everything?”

Just as quickly her voice regained composure. She sounded every bit the lawyer in a cross-examination: “I don’t know what you mean. But we can talk, can’t we? I can come over...”

He interrupted with an angry retort, shouting, “You can come over and bring my shit home. Then I’ll tell the police to stop the investigation. If I don’t get my shit you’ll be sorry.”

Catherine’s voice dissolved into that of a frightened girl, showing that she, too, was playing for the tape recorder, preserving the record on her allegations of abuse. Almost sobbing, she said: “You will promise not to hurt me again?”

He ignored the trap and avoided a debate on whether or not he had been guilty of violence. Instead, he simply replied: “I’ll be here.”

The tone on the tape was chilling and the implication clear. Recently, it appeared, Tedesco and Catherine had arranged a meeting at Tedesco’s home where he had been found murdered. That tape was destined to become a classic in the police department’s archives, a conversation piece for the next year or more as top cops and prosecutors analyzed the range of emotion, the danger it betrayed, and the sound of a dead man talking to someone who might have become his killer just hours after it was made.

Homicide detectives spoke briefly with her after they left the scene. Questioned at the police station, Catherine dazzled with her verbal footwork and intellectual agility. Later, for a magazine interview in 1980, she would recall the interrogation and laugh about the end of it. As she started to leave, she would say, one detective leaned over and asked, “Just one more question. Did you love him?”

Cackling with laughter, Catherine would describe her response: “I guess he was expecting me to break down and cry out, ‘Yes, yes, and I killed him!’ But I just said, ‘No’ and walked out.”

Detectives believed they had the right track with her. But the murder was horrific and raised many questions about Catherine. Could a woman actually have beaten someone like this? Did she have an accomplice? And what purpose did Tedesco’s murder serve? Didn’t she need the divorce to get her share of their alleged community property?

They had an answer to that last question soon enough. Within days of the murder, Catherine Mehaffey marched into the Harris County Clerk’s office and filed a new cause of action. No longer just the estranged wife of

George Tedesco, she sought new status as the doctor's widow. She wanted the whole estate and planned a probate action to grab it.

The cops realized they needed additional brainpower and legal savvy on this case. So they recruited assistance from the Special Crimes Bureau of the Harris County District Attorney's office, a unit created to unravel criminal activities too complex for the regular cops.

And I'm sure that Catherine was tickled giddy by the attention. For her it would have been like the county just raised the bounty on her reward poster.

At least, that's what she told me later.