POST SERIAL

Wife's therapist has a suspicion

A Deadly Secret
Homicide in Palo Alto

A fictional serial by John Angell Grant

My wife's therapist asked me to visit her office. I wasn't happy about that. She set it up with a phone call.

"Is this Marcel Tesco?" she said.

"Yes," I said. "Who is this?"

"This is Stephanie Witz," she said. "I am Carla's therapist. I need you to come and see me. It's important."

What did she mean by, "I am Carla's therapist?" Her use of the present tense was creepy. Was that a slip of the tongue; or was she communicating with a woman who was dead; or what?

My uncle, who had been a psychiatrist, told me that the people who become shrinks are the bottom students in their medical school classes; and they are also people who feel they have their own personal psychological problems; so it appeals to them to become psychiatrists, so they can figure themselves out.

"Oh, I'm so sad," I said over the phone. "This is so tragic, Stephanie. I don't know what to do. I loved Carla so much."

"That's not what she told me," said Stephanie.

I felt uncomfortable. "What do you mean by that?" I said.

"She said the two of you had problems," Stephanie said.

Play the part

"Sure," I said. "The usual stuff couples go through. We had some of that. Like everyone. Nothing different than any other marriage."

"She said more," Stephanie replied.

"So what did she say, Stephanie?" I felt myself getting testy. That was the wrong persona. You're a grieving husband, I said to myself. Play that part. Don't let this aggressive woman get under your skin.

"She said she didn't feel safe with you," said Stephanie.

"That's a laugh," I said. "Carla Maxwell, the high-tech entrepreneurial genius of Silicon Valley? Afraid of me?"

"That's what she said," the shrink repeated.

"Hey," I said, "You've got it backwards, Stephanie. If you're an American CEO and your operation is stagnating, then you should be afraid of Carla."

A shrink trick

There was a long silence on the phone.

That's one of those shrink tricks, I surmised, where they sit silent until you think they're dead. And then your own thoughts finally come swelling up, and you spill the beans.

She's not going to trick me, I thought.

"Hello," I finally said.

"I'm here," Stephanie said.

That annoyed me. She was just sitting there, waiting. Normally she'd do that for $250 an hour. But I wasn't paying her a penny.

"Marcel," she finally said. "I want to come and see you."

"Things are hectic right now, Stephanie," I said. "That's going to be difficult."

"Marcel," she said. "I think you killed your wife."

"Dr. Witz, you're losing it," I retorted. That was probably the wrong thing to say. What would an innocent person say? "You're gas-lighting me," I said.

Gas-lighting

That's from the movie "Gaslight," where Charles Boyer makes his wife Ingrid Bergmann think she's going crazy. When she expresses concern about what's being done to her, he tells her the fact that she thinks she is going crazy is proof that she is going crazy.

In other words, re-victimizing the victim. That's gas-lighting.

"How about this afternoon?" Stephanie said.

"What time," I said.

"Two," she said.

"Where?" I said.

"My office," she said.

The meeting turned out to be difficult.

Tomorrow: Episode 11. To catch up on previous episodes, go to johnangellgrant.com.