

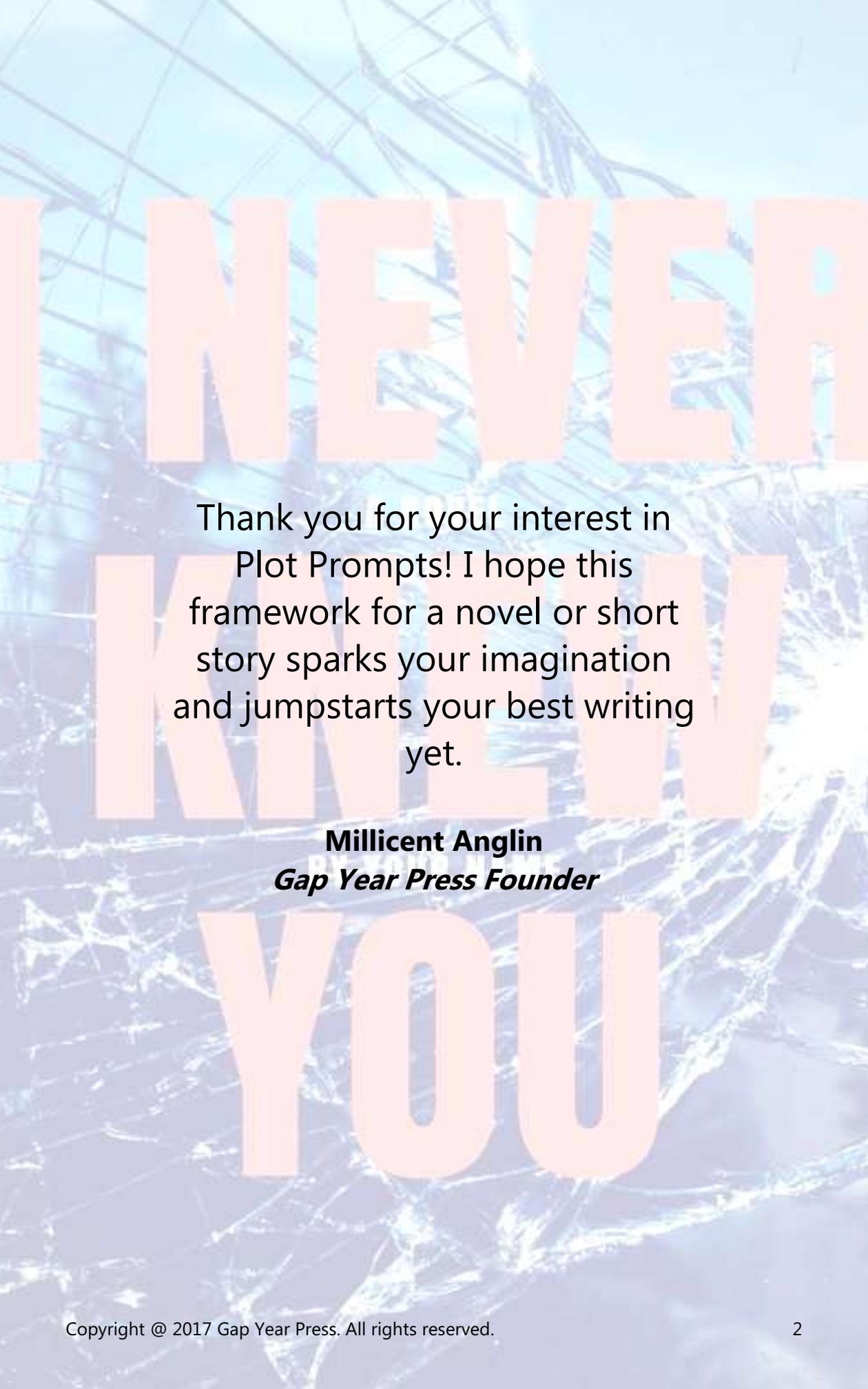
I NEVER

A NOVEL

KNEW

BY YOUR NAME

YOU



I NEVER
KILLED
YOU

Thank you for your interest in
Plot Prompts! I hope this
framework for a novel or short
story sparks your imagination
and jumpstarts your best writing
yet.

Millicent Anglin
Gap Year Press Founder

Proposed Title

I Never Knew You

Genre

Mystery

Themes

Betrayal - As devastating as betrayal is, people often ignore the red flags that could spare them unnecessary heartbreak. Is tolerating betrayal just a part of loving someone? Is betrayal of omission as egregious as betrayal of commission? Should a wife be loyal to a disloyal husband and vice versa?

Violence - People who have committed violent acts often consider themselves to be good people. Is this possible? If everyone does bad things, who is considered good? Do good acts offset bad ones, or are some crimes impossible to atone for?

Relationships - Couples can date for years before getting married, yet most spouses are still capable of shocking their significant other. How well can we expect to know someone before we marry them? Should there be full disclosure of past misdeeds before marriage, or is it best to let sleeping dogs lie? How do we know whether someone is showing us their true self?

Justice - Most people lament miscarriages of justice, yet few are willing to make the sacrifices needed to ensure fairness. Would you protect someone who had broken the law? Are there instances when it's okay to avoid reporting a crime?

Description

A woman learns of her husband's past crimes and is torn between love and terror.

Synopsis

Shana Morris, a stay-at-home wife and mother, is preparing to move into her dream home. She is packing when she stumbles across a shoebox nestled among her husband's old college knickknacks. The box contains a curious mix of oddities—old newspaper clippings, tarnished costume jewelry, lacy panties. Uneasy, she skims the Austin American-Statesman articles and is surprised her husband saved stories about a crime wave some fifteen years ago. Though Shana tries to forget the box, its contents take on a life of their own and refuse to be silenced. When the time comes for Shana to speak up, will she?

Setting

Round Rock, TX in the year 2000. DNA testing is becoming ubiquitous and creating an opportunity for cold cases to be solved.

Main Characters

Shana Morris – A thirty-five-year-old mother of three living in suburban Texas, Shana is smart but not particularly ambitious. She gave up a budding career as a prosecutor, but never regretted her decision. Happily married to her college sweetheart Simon, her biggest concern is making sure her kids don't grow up too fast. When her past collides with her present, she's forced to rethink her life, her choices, and her trust in the man she loves.

Simon Morris – Ambitious from a young age, Simon knew he would be a successful businessman one day. Minutes after meeting Shana, he decided she would be his wife. He always has a plan and always knows what he's doing. He considers himself to be intellectually superior to his wife—to most people—but has learned to keep these thoughts to himself. He believes being a good provider offsets his current and past misdeeds, and can't remember the last time he felt guilty about anything.

Heather Johnson – Close friends since first grade, Heather and Shana were ecstatic when they were accepted into the same

college. Brash and bossy, Heather hadn't kept her misgivings about Simon to herself, and encouraged Shana to keep her options open. As Shana grows older without her best friend, Heather's old advice becomes Shana's guiding light.

Plot Outline

ACT 1 (Exposition):

I. Setup

- In 1985, Shana was a college junior and had recently broken up with Simon. Though she loved him, her friend and roommate Heather warned her not to ignore Simon's manipulative behavior. Returning home from a blind date one night, Shana found Heather had been viciously murdered. The crime was the beginning of a spree that engulfed the University of Texas at Austin campus for months and claimed two more victims. In the midst of Shana's fear and grief, Simon showed her a tender side she'd never seen before. Moving in with Simon made Shana feel safe and they became engaged shortly thereafter. Shana's interest in law enforcement was born out of this experience. She earns a law degree and works briefly in the district attorney's office before her first child is born.
- In the present, Shana is ensconced in comfortable domesticity when she discovers a box that thrusts her back in time. She asks Simon about the box's contents and he says he followed the murder case on Shana's behalf, hoping the police would catch the perpetrator. He says the undies are Shana's, but they don't seem familiar to her.
- Shana forgets the box as she and her family move into their sprawling new home. Her focus is on getting her six-year-old twin girls ready for first grade and her ten-year-old son ready for his first year of Pop Warner football.

II. Inciting Incident – Simon’s business partners force him out of their IT consultancy due to differences of opinion in the firm’s direction. Though Simon is given a buyout, Shana goes back to work in the DA’s office to help cover the bills while Simon looks for work.

III. Plot Point #1 – Shana is assigned to work with the prosecutor’s new cold case division. Her first case is the UT Austin murders from fifteen years ago. Shana doesn’t disclose her connection to the case because she doesn’t want to be reassigned. As she reviews the case files, she sees her husband was once a person of interest.

ACT 2 (Rising Action):

IV. Subplots that facilitate character development:

- Shana learns that witnesses place Simon near two of the three crime scenes. Without telling him she’s working on the cold case, Shana nonchalantly asks Simon about his activities during that time. He says he joined a volunteer neighborhood patrol to help find the killer. Shana is surprised to belatedly learn this, but doesn’t have any reason to doubt her husband’s character. Since his job loss, Simon helps more around the house and signs on to coach their son’s football team.
- Digging through old evidence boxes, Shana unearths a rape kit taken during Heather’s autopsy. Shana submits the kit to be processed, and though a male’s DNA is extracted from the sample, it doesn’t match any known offender. DNA testing soon eliminates all persons of interest except for Simon. After some indecision, Shana surreptitiously “donates” Simon’s DNA for testing, but the results are inconclusive.
- Shana learns that the jewelry and underwear in Simon’s shoebox match descriptions of missing items from the victims’ apartments. She also learns that her husband

was asked to leave his business partnership because of sexual harassment claims that Simon vehemently denied.

- The district attorney discovers Shana's connection to the case and fires her for failing to disclose the conflict of interest. Shana doesn't tell her husband, and continues to investigate the case on her own.

V. Plot Point #2 (Confrontation) - While coaching a football game, Simon is arrested on the sidelines. Distracted when he sees his father taken away, Shana's son is hurt in the game. Shana gets a second mortgage on their house to bail her husband out of jail and to pay her son's medical bills.

ACT 3: (Falling Action):

VI. Climax - At home and under pressure from Shana, Simon confesses to all three murders. He blames Heather for meddling in his relationship with Shana and provoking his rage. He says the other two murders were merely to distract the police from his connection to Heather. Shana is horrified and locks herself in a bedroom with her children while Simon pleads for forgiveness through the door. Shana and the children move out the next day, but she doesn't disclose his confession to the police.

VII. Resolution - At trial, Simon's attorney hints that Shana planted evidence against her husband as revenge for his alleged sexual indiscretions. However, the attorney is unable to explain away the state's strong circumstantial case and Simon is convicted on two counts of first-degree murder; he receives the death penalty. No one is ever charged and convicted for Heather's murder. Shana sells her dream home and moves out of town, but not before visiting Heather's gravesite one last time.

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