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Actual Malice: A True Crime Political Thriller

By Breton Peace



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Actual Malice: A True Crime Political Thriller By Breton Peace

Actual Malice is a true crime thriller that will take you through the backrooms of political gamesmanship, deception, and cover-up. If it were a novel, readers would marvel at the rich character development, riveting pace, and often-bizarre twists that make *Actual Malice* a compelling read. The fact that it is scrupulously documented nonfiction is sobering.

If you know nothing about Gary Condit or the tragic death of Chandra Levy, there has never been a more engaging and thoughtful introduction to the sordid interplay between politicians, law enforcement, and the media. *Actual Malice* should be required reading for any public figure.

If you followed the story of the murdered intern and the congressman driven from office by one of the most intense media cyclones in history, *Actual Malice* will challenge virtually everything you think you know.

Breton Peace takes readers on a roller coaster ride through Congressman Condit's eyes, as corrupt and incompetent cops and a dark, insidious team of "scandal management" experts manipulate a willing press.

To begin, Carolyn and Gary Condit had come an incredible distance together since setting out from Oklahoma for California where Gary and the Condit family name became synonymous with the Central Valley.

In May of 2001, the moderate Blue Dog Democrats—of which Condit was a founding member—held significant power in Congress. Condit had used the coalition to deliver bipartisan victories in Bill Clinton's second term and was now flexing that muscle on the House Intelligence Committee. Condit accomplished what few of his generation could achieve—genuine political independence from both political machines.

The sky was the limit.

When Chandra Levy—a twenty-four-year-old Bureau of Prisons intern—disappeared in 2001, the wheels came off Gary's ambitions. Accused of having an affair with Levy, a whirlwind of rumor, intrigue, and treachery surrounded him.

More than a decade of lies, manipulation, and deception followed until, in 2016, the justice system cracked under the stress of its own spinelessness.

Actual Malice chronicles in vivid detail the heartache and intrigue behind the

salacious, if fanciful, headlines that too often drive public debate and derail the serious business of our nation and its system of justice.

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I came to this project as a young lawyer in a large law firm with both the advantage and disadvantage of growing up knowing Gary Condit as my father's friend.

I say "disadvantage" because I was trained as a lawyer, and as such, I was conscious of my obligation to look at the public evidence objectively while simultaneously having been privy to how the story unfolded privately.

I shared with Chad and Cadee Condit the common experience of growing up in a political family. Our moms both stayed home to raise their kids despite the trend to the contrary. It was based on these familial connections and common experiences that Gary's kids asked me to help their father tell his story.

I was initially stunned by the overwhelming physical evidence in the case. Chad Condit had maintained and secured every scrap of paper during the tumultuous events. And, after his first encounter with police, Gary and his attorney, Abbe Lowell, had made a critical decision to have detailed records taken of every interaction with law enforcement thereafter. This book would not exist had they not done this.

In writing, I was committed to pulling the story from the records in a way that gives you a sense of the manic pace with which the saga unfolded, as well as honestly depicting the Kafkaesque cast of characters and kaleidoscope of subplots that—but for the body of evidence in my care—would seem too entertaining, bizarre, or tragic to be true.

For every ounce of adrenaline generated by a new revelation of corruption and unforeseen connection as I researched and wrote, there was a greater dose of sadness knowing that this was not a work of fiction. A sadness that was, and remains today, specific to Chandra Levy, Joyce Chiang, and the other real people that you will meet in this book, and more general sadness grounded in the recognition that the only closure is acceptance that there can no longer be any.

This is not a redemptive story, and there are no heroes. Laced amid the personal tragedies is a painful truth about a broken system of justice in which so many with power are bent by ambition, indifferent to truth, incompetent, or all three.

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