

No one knew what kind of evil was visiting North Texas senior living communities.

But when a precious necklace went missing from her dead mother's apartment, Shannon Gleason Dion began a long and difficult search for the truth.

Guardians

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Part one of a two-part series.

hey found 92-year-old Doris Gleason lying near the dining room table.

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“She’s here,” an employee told Doris’ daughter Shannon, who had been searching the apartment for her. “She’s gone.”

Shannon turned and saw her mother’s dark slacks, suede shoes, gray blouse. She sank into a sofa and didn’t move.

Soon, two Dallas police officers arrived at The Tradition-Prestonwood, a luxury senior living complex in Far North Dallas. Natural causes, they said. A sad but unsurprising ending.

As funeral workers prepared to take Doris away, Shannon approached the gurney, leaned over and kissed her mother’s cold forehead.

She asked about the jewelry her mother had been wearing. The funeral workers pointed to the counter, where they’d placed Doris’ wedding rings.

What about the gold necklace, the one with the guardian angel? Doris wore it every day, every night, all the time. Shannon had an identical one around her own neck.

There was no necklace, they said.

Shannon found Doris’ purse and dug through it. No necklace — and no cash. Her husband Eric joined in the search. Rings and other jewelry were missing from an antique box in the bedroom, too.

Eric found a phone and dialed 911.



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They try to find somewhere they’ll be taken care of, where the food is good and they’ll be comfortable. Somewhere that has a knitting club and throws holiday parties.

Sometimes the move is their idea. Often, it’s not.

The best of us bring groceries, fix the computer and take them to church, as Shannon Gleason Dion did faithfully through her mother’s final years.

We understand, as Shannon did, that this will likely be their last chapter. Even in places of comfort — especially in places of comfort — death finds a way in.

When that day comes, we reassure ourselves that it was peaceful. Natural. Even if there was pain, we hope it was brief.

But what if that's not what happens? What if the truth is something else entirely and you don't even know it?

Today, at least 13 families in North Texas are coping with the shock of learning that their loved ones' seemingly peaceful deaths were anything but. A half-dozen more are awaiting confirmation of their worst fears about their own relatives.

No one recognized evil when it visited — not the families, not the cops, and not the posh senior living homes where grandmothers stopped showing up for water aerobics.

Shannon didn't see it at first. But from those first hours in her mother's apartment on the day before Halloween 2016, she just had a feeling something wasn't right.



Shannon Gleason Dion, shown in her Carrollton home, was the first to discover after her mother's body was found at The Tradition-Prestonwood in October 2016 that some of her jewelry — including a cherished gold necklace with a guardian angel — was missing.



Jerry and Doris Gleason married in Dallas in 1954. Their two daughters were born here but raised in Connecticut, where Jerry worked in the oil business. Shannon and her sister, Nancy, moved back to North Texas after high school. Doris and Jerry followed soon after, settling into a pale brick house on Squireswood Drive in Carrollton. They stayed more than 30 years, safe behind a tall iron gate.

A few years ago, over dinner at their home, the couple surprised Shannon and her husband with the news that they'd been looking at independent-living complexes. They'd found a good fit: The Tradition-Prestonwood.

Shannon had always assumed she'd have to arrange for her parents' care when they got older. But Doris and Jerry made everything easy. Several months later, they moved into a two-bedroom apartment on the third floor, with a window that faced the front of the complex. The cost: about \$5,600 a month.



Doris Gleason

With ornate finishings and high-end amenities, The Tradition-Prestonwood markets itself as one of Dallas' premier senior living communities. Its website invites residents to "surround yourself in a world of beauty."

"It's immaculate, it really is," said Eric Dion, Shannon's husband. "It's made to look very homey and beautiful."

The Tradition-Prestonwood offers a range of services, including assisted living and memory care. The Gleasons didn't need those things. They moved into the independent-living area, which has an indoor pool and a spa. It offers weekly housekeeping, an arts and crafts studio, a movie theater, a library, a space for guest speakers and performances.

For the first couple of years, Shannon picked up her parents every Sunday for church. They would sit in the same pew — Shannon closest to the aisle, Jerry in the middle, Doris on the right — every week without fail.

In August 2015, Jerry had a stroke, and another a few months later. Just after his 94th birthday he died, with Doris holding his hand. They'd been married 61 years.





It took a while for Doris to begin wearing colors again, but in early 2016, she returned to the activities she'd always enjoyed. She went back to her sit-and-sew group. She started tai chi again and within a few weeks was winning at bingo night.

She kept a day planner where she recorded every appointment, meeting and exercise class in tight script. When she completed each activity, she marked it off with a little check mark.

On Fridays, Shannon would pick up her mother for a 10 a.m. haircut. While her mom was in the salon, Shannon would run to Walmart and buy Doris' groceries. Then they'd go to Frost Bank, where Doris would withdraw enough cash to get her through the week.

Sunday morning was church, side by side in their usual pew.

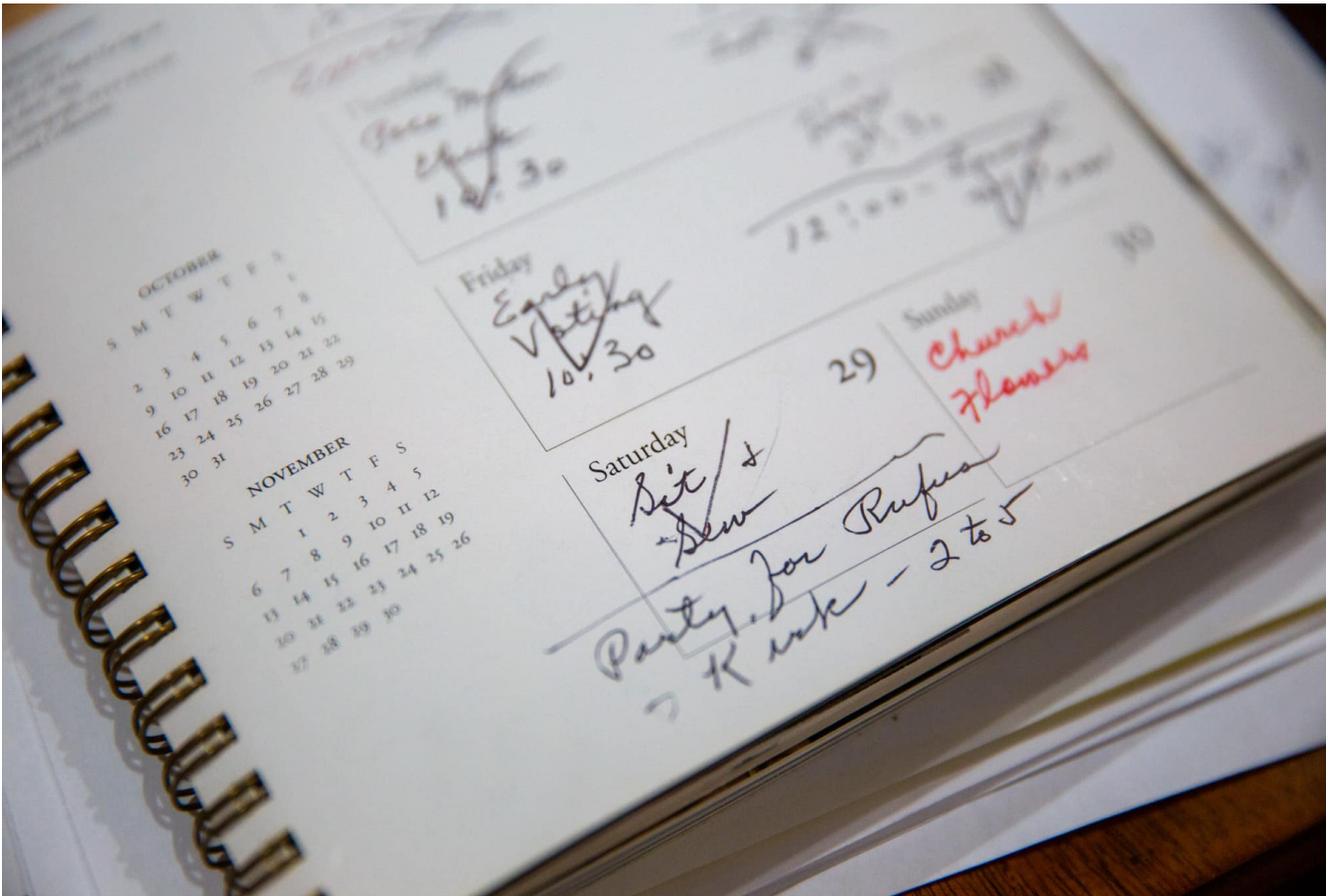
"She was my buddy," Shannon said.

On Oct. 28, 2016, Shannon and Doris kept their usual Friday appointments. Back at The Tradition, Shannon helped her mom unpack the groceries, then turned to leave. She had sorority sisters in town she was excited to see. Doris told her to go have fun.

"I love you," they said to each other.

After Shannon left, Doris got her planner, pulled out a pen and marked off their regular outing with a little black check mark.

On the next day in Doris' planner, the check marks stop.



Doris Gleason had a day planner in which she recorded and checked off all her activities and appointments, and her daughter Shannon kept it after her mother's death. Police determined the approximate time of Doris' death from her planner activity, which showed that she missed a party that Saturday afternoon.



They found her that Sunday morning.

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Shannon sat bereft on the sofa as the police and funeral workers went about their grim business. Her grief turned to anxiety when she realized things were missing.

After Eric called 911, the cops returned. This time, they asked detailed questions. What was Doris' routine? Did she have any plans? Where had she been recently? A homicide detective arrived and dusted for fingerprints.

The officers filed a theft report and ordered an autopsy before her body could be released to the funeral home.

The initial word from the medical examiner's office came quickly: no signs of trauma. Months later, the State of Texas declared Doris Gleason had died of natural causes.

“Cardiac dysrhythmia,” it said on her death certificate. “Old age.”

If that was the case, Shannon thought, someone was in her mother’s apartment after she died. Instead of calling for help, they had robbed her.

It didn’t make sense. Something just seemed off.

Some people might have let it go. Shannon wasn’t from that kind of family.



In November 1988, a stranger showed up at Nancy Gleason Taylor’s home near Highland Park, posing as a delivery man. When Nancy opened the door, the man dropped a package inside and confronted her with a .357 Magnum handgun. Then he made her drive him to his apartment before taking her on an aimless, hours-long journey around North Texas.

After Nancy’s husband reported her missing, police talked to a neighbor who saw Nancy drive off with a strange man in her back seat. Shannon, her parents and the rest of the family waited and prayed together into the evening while the police searched. Officers found Nancy and her attacker after 1 a.m. at a motel where the man, Glen Anthony, had forced her to pay for a room.

At the trial the next summer, Nancy testified about her ordeal — how she felt herself tearing when Anthony raped her on the floor of his apartment. How he made her wear her bloody underwear after he was done. How he drove her to the Piney Woods of East Texas, where he threatened to kill her and bury her in a shallow grave.

It was the first time Shannon and her parents heard the horrific details.

Jurors took less than three hours to find Anthony guilty. He was sentenced to 99 years in state prison. But after just a few years, it became clear that keeping Nancy’s attacker locked up would take the entire family’s persistence.



A photo of Doris Gleason and daughter Nancy Gleason Taylor is displayed in Shannon's home in Carrollton. Nancy, who died of pancreatic cancer, was abducted and raped in 1988. Her family has fought to keep her attacker, who was sentenced to 99 years in prison, from being paroled.

By the time he first came up for release in 2003, Nancy was dying of pancreatic cancer. Her husband, Thomas Taylor, wrote to the parole board on her behalf, and Anthony was denied release.

After Nancy died, the family kept fighting. First in 2011, when Doris and Jerry wrote to the parole board. Then in 2016, when Shannon helped Doris compose a letter and mail it in.

Late that summer, they got word that Anthony would not be released, but he'd be back in front of the parole board every year from then on.

"I resent that some of my mother's last months, days were used talking about this," Shannon said.

Doris and her daughters had always been close, but after that night in 1988 they took on new roles in each others' lives. They thought of themselves as guardians, always wearing the gold angel necklaces Nancy bought for them on a trip to Florence, Italy. Even after Nancy was gone, Shannon and Doris wore theirs every day.

Now, in the fall of 2016, Shannon had only her necklace and far too many questions.

“I come from very logical parents,” she said. “My genetic makeup is things have to make sense.”



With the gold angel necklace she always wears, Shannon drives to Restland Memorial Park to visit her parents' graves and bring fresh flowers.



Shannon, her mother Doris and sister Nancy wore the same angel necklaces after Nancy bought them in Florence, Italy. After Nancy's brutal attack in 1988, they saw themselves as one another's guardians.



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nsatisfied with what the cops had told her, Shannon was determined to investigate further.

She thought back to her first job out of college. She had been a caseworker for Dallas congressman Jim Collins, gathering information with a tool anyone can use: open records law.

She filed a request with the Dallas Police Department, asking for two years' worth of police reports at The Tradition-Prestonwood.

The records arrived in the mail after many weeks, a thick stack of documents with information about who had called the police, what had happened, and whether there were any identifiable victims or suspects.

Shannon found reports of unaccompanied deaths. Suspicious-person reports. Break-ins. Thefts.

In July 2016, resident Joyce Abramowitz was found dead in her apartment of natural causes, according to the reports.

A week later, her son reported that her safe had been stolen.

Later that month, a woman named Juanita Purdy died at The Tradition-Prestonwood of natural causes, according to the reports. Her daughter called police a few days later, saying Purdy's jewelry cabinet had been raided by an intruder.

Leah Corken was found dead, natural causes, and her daughter called police when she couldn't find her mother's wedding ring.

An unnamed woman was found dead, natural causes, and her daughter also called police after finding that over \$6,000 worth of jewelry and cash were missing. She reported at the time that she thought paramedics might have taken the items.

Margaret White was found dead, natural causes, that August.

Solomon Spring, Glenna Day and Doris were all found dead that October, and each death was listed as natural causes.

Then, in November, a report of a suspicious person. A black man, 5-10, 180 pounds, carrying a leather satchel.

The man “has been seen on numerous occasions visiting the fourth floor and has stated he was there to check for pipe leaks,” according to a police report. The responding officer walked the fourth floor but didn’t find the man.

Before leaving, the officer told staff “to tighten security and possibly go door to door,” the report said.

Description (p. 1)



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Shannon had found a pattern. She was convinced that someone was sneaking into people’s apartments after they died and taking jewelry and other precious items.

She wanted someone to know. She wanted everyone to know.

Shannon emailed a reporter at *The Dallas Morning News*. She sent the packet of documents in a manila envelope, but nobody followed up with her for an interview. This newspaper missed the story.

A few weeks after sending her tip to *The News*, Shannon left comments on The Tradition-Prestonwood’s Yelp page. The one-star review posted by “Shannon D.” from Carrollton **is still online**.

“The food and ambiance are delightful,” the review begins. “The security is unacceptable. I urge anyone considering living here to evaluate how easy it is for uninvited outsiders to have unmonitored access to residential floors.”



Shannon pulls on boots before leaving her home in Carrollton to attend an equine therapy session at Paws for Reflection in Midlothian. She says the drive to the therapy ranch helps her prepare emotionally for the sessions.



Shannon says working with horses at the Midlothian therapy ranch has helped her make progress in healing from the tragedy of her mother's slaying.



After posting the review, Shannon tried to go on with her life. The family mourned the first anniversary of Doris' death. Shannon continued to write and call the parole board, and Nancy's attacker stayed in prison.

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Every Sunday, Shannon went to church. She'd sit in the same pew as always, take communion and sing — “loud, low and off key,” she likes to say.

One evening in July 2018, Shannon and Eric returned from an evening walk with their dogs to find a voicemail from a detective with the Plano Police Department.

Shannon called him back right away. The detective had seen her Yelp review and wanted to know more about her mother's death.

He told her to write down a name and look it up it later. He spelled it out just to make sure she had it right.

C-H-E-M-I-R-M-I-R.

Be the first to read Guardians: Part Two

Enter your email below to be notified when the second part of Guardians publishes Thursday on DallasNews.com.

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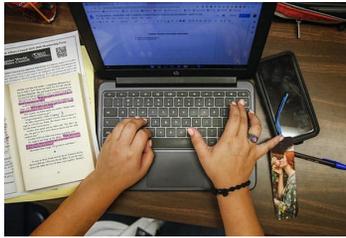


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