

# *Responsible Men, a novel*

By Edward Schwarzschild

## Excerpt

One mid-June morning, Max Wolinsky sat in his LeSabre, getting ready to sell what would never exist. He was back in Philadelphia, visiting from Key Largo for his son's bar mitzvah, and while he was in town he'd decided to raise some much-needed cash for his aging father, Caleb, and his strokeslowed uncle Abraham. Max didn't like running a new scam so close to his family. Don't shit in your own backyard, as the old commandment goes. It hadn't been his backyard for months, but still, for his father's sake, the last thing he wanted was a mess.

He reviewed the information he'd jotted on a three-by-five card. He had more than enough to work with. Gail and David Gould. In their seventies. Talked to agents about selling their house. Already visited Breye's Run and Curtis Estates. Love the New Jersey shore and used to summer at the Ventnor Motel.

He wasn't going to use his real name. He rarely did in business anymore. For the Goulds he planned to be Larry Zevin, nephew of one of their dead, distant friends. He plugged his razor into the Buick's cigarette lighter and ran the buzzing blades over his face. He wondered if his son, Nathan, was shaving yet. Probably not, though how could he be sure? It had been six months since they'd seen each other and back then some peach fuzz had begun to appear on Nathan's upper lip and chin.

Max checked his work in the rearview mirror, trying to decide if he looked like someone who had a thirteen-year-old kid. He tended to think of himself as a youthful forty-one, a man who resembled his son more than his father. He kept himself in decent shape; he had his hair, and it was dark brown, without gray. His whiskers, however, were tinged with silver.

Before climbing out of the car, he slapped on aftershave, packed away his latest cell phone, and fingered through a folder of well-made documents: map, floor plans, artist's rendering, miniature blueprint, and glossy pamphlets. Large teal letters headlined each piece of paper: Oceanview Gardens—The Retirement Resort.

I have what they want, he told himself as he walked up the winding flagstone path, swinging his briefcase. I hold the key to their future. It was a big front yard and there was more land around back, full of fruit trees, flowers, and green freshly cut grass. A Honda and a Volvo waited in the driveway. Max straightened his tan linen sport coat and rang the bell. When the door opened, he started pitching to the elderly couple before him. The only word he wanted to hear from them was yes.

"My name is Larry Zevin," he said. "I'm Stuart Fox's nephew. Are you Mr. and Mrs. Gould?"

"Yes," said Gail.

"I understand that you want to live near Atlantic City someday. You want a retirement community by the ocean. On the boardwalk. Far from the casinos. Affordable. Also at least partially Jewish. Am I right?"

"Yes," said David.

"I have a few things I'd like to show you," Max said. "May I come in?"

"Yes," they both answered. David opened the front door all the way.

Max stepped in, moving at their pace.