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Media contact: A. Tony Mendoza · press@inoursecretlife.com

A \$160 Million Painting Hung Behind Their Bedroom Door for 32 Years. An El Paso Novelist Imagines the Marriage That Kept the Secret.

In Our Secret Life, a novel inspired by the 1985 theft of Willem de Kooning's *Woman-Ochre*, arrives October 27

EL PASO, Texas — October 5, 2026 — On the day after Thanksgiving in 1985, a man and a woman walked into the University of Arizona Museum of Art in Tucson, cut Willem de Kooning's *Woman-Ochre* from its frame and walked out in under fifteen minutes. Thirty-two years later, the painting turned up behind a bedroom door in a quiet couple's home in New Mexico, valued at as much as \$160 million. No one was ever charged.

El Paso author A. Tony Mendoza asks the question that case left behind: what kind of marriage keeps a secret like that? His debut novel, *In Our Secret Life* (Sly Dog Press), goes on sale October 27, 2026, in hardcover and ebook.

The novel follows Jerry and Rita Adler, two pickpockets who meet in the Catskills in 1955 and build a fifty-seven-year marriage around a hidden life: two careers teaching school, travels to a hundred countries, and a life no teacher's salary could ever explain. Of everything they ever took, only one thing stayed: a woman in ochre, behind their bedroom door for more than thirty years.

Rita tells the story herself, moving backward from her final days as the illness taking her memory threatens the secret she guarded her whole life.

"Everyone who read the headlines in 2017 asked the same thing: how could two ordinary people live with that painting for thirty years?" said Mendoza. "I wanted to write the marriage, not the crime. The theft is the hook. Jerry and Rita are the story."

For six years, Mendoza has been the primary caregiver for his father, Anastacio "Tacho" Mendoza Sr., a 1955 Texas State Golden Gloves champion who lives with Alzheimer's disease. That experience shaped Rita's voice. The book is dedicated to his father.

In Our Secret Life is a work of fiction. Jerry and Rita Adler are invented characters, and the novel does not claim to solve the real case. An author's note sets out where the documented record ends and the story begins. The book includes a reading group guide.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

A. Tony Mendoza is an El Paso entrepreneur, publisher and editor who started his first business at nineteen. He published an El Paso business newspaper and was named the U.S. Small Business Administration's Young Entrepreneur of the Year. *In Our Secret Life* is his first novel.

BOOK DETAILS

Title	<i>In Our Secret Life: A Novel</i> by A. Tony Mendoza
Publisher	Sly Dog Press, El Paso, Texas · On sale October 27, 2026
Formats	Hardcover, ISBN 979-8-9969706-1-2, \$34.99, 390 pages · Ebook, ISBN 979-8-9969706-3-6, \$9.99 · Trade paperback, June 1, 2027
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Review copies, author photos and interviews are available on request. Press kit: inoursecretlife.com/press

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