

CONFESSIONS OF AN *ASSASSIN*

1

LOOKING BACK

It all began so innocently. Looking back, it causes great sadness to think of the person I was at that time — young, full of promise. I thought of myself as beautiful, superior to the others. Now I realize just how foolish, off course I had become, even in college, from the young girl in Manhattan, New York. My parents were part of the Carnegie clan. Our heritage caused great pride in all of us, even though my family was considered “the bottom of the line.” Father and Mother were labeled “rebels.” Plenty of money and prestige, they were easily accepted at family functions. Yet they were considered different. Never did they put on airs as some of the more distant family members frequented. Socially, their friends were very diverse. Those friends would not have been accepted by the rest of the family.

I, on the other hand, was a snob, just like the distant others. Pure and simple, if people didn't meet my standards for beauty or style, I wasn't interested. I surrounded myself with shallow and contemptuous people. Easy to be happy when you are told only what is

expected, never the truth. To my mind, they were true friends. Believing that they would always be just that, I wrapped myself in their lies. What a foolish and shallow person I also was. This reference is not to my circle of friends.

True friends, I had six of them. They remain my family. The contemptuousness to which I refer was a group. Not any group but a hallowed government organization to which membership was indeed rare. My inclusion caused great pride in the beginning. Later, I would see the depths to which they condescended to achieve their warped objectives. Until I die, I shall regret my frivolous notion that affiliation with them ever achieved anything more than the greatest loss of my life.

Now, I am an older woman at the proud age of fifty, but I am not proud. How I wish that I had taken a different course. If only I followed the principles of my grandfather. Faith was a cornerstone for him. I possessed that faith, but as I matured, I thought it “uncool.” So I allowed my friends to direct my choices even though that small voice inside tried to give me the right direction. I made many mistakes over the course of my life until I suddenly figured out that I was a mess. Then I needed much correction just as a sailboat, which erred off course for a long time. Changing my life and cleaning up my

mistakes proved difficult and costly. In fact, I find it impossible to remove the baggage, which I created.

The big regret of my life was allowing my country to dictate actions, which were despicable. For my country, I committed the unthinkable act. It happened so slowly, getting caught in the web of lies. My life seemed glamorous, more than I ever dreamed. My actions became more and more exciting. The thrill was like a drug. I required added doses. Mounting danger simply increased the rush, which I experienced. Yet I told myself that I was noble, doing the right thing. To this day, I am not sure of one act— that treacherous thing which rids me of sleep even now. Right or wrong, I know I have received forgiveness. God has forgiven me, this I know, but I can't forgive myself. I suffer daily. Sometimes, when I am lying alone in a cold bed, I remember the life that I once possessed— the love that I shared with a man whom I never really knew, or did I? They told me I misread him. He was not the man whom I loved. That is the saddest part of my life. The part that I still grieve, the loss I unwittingly created. That loss is sometimes still unbearable. I acted without regard to his love. Superiority never allowed me to question my actions.

“Just do what you are told. Act, don't react.”

Brainwashing created a lifestyle, a way of thought. After my loss, when regret overcame me, it occurred too late.

Maybe I could never prove his innocence. No proof was ever given to me of the “terrorist actions” he supposedly committed. How could I know the truth about him? I couldn’t. For the rest of my days, I would question if there was a chance that he was my love. Still, my mind was wired to believe them. Had he merely used me to fulfill his objectives? The beautiful life that I treasured and that I still miss was it really a lie? Was he so devious and cunning?

The result of the life that I chose results in mistrust, concerning everyone. My solitary life is necessary for self-preservation. Things could change in a split second. They might come to the door or approach me on the street. They are all powerful, irrefutable. Therefore, I try not to create any news. My quiet life is my only choice. Now I live with fear each day, afraid that there may be a knock on the door and several men in suits will look blankly at me. I will know what is happening but not what awaits. Anything could occur. Such is the life I created. My choices killed my chance of happiness. Fear and loss consume my life now.

This is not what I once expected. If I don’t travel or call attention, maybe they will forget me. I know better, but I live that way. Life remains sad and unfulfilled. To find myself becoming old is beyond my expectations. I never envisioned being such. To find myself older and filled

with regrets is torture. Perhaps this is paranoia due to mental pain or old age, I am not sure. There is no one whom I can consult. Age has racked my mind prematurely due to the pain, which I carried for so long. Physically, I suffer from arthritis. My beauty is gone.

Never did I try to replace him. There was no one who came close to winning my heart. After my loss, I silently suffered the pain and loneliness, which I created. I didn't deserve to love again. Never would I know a life with a partner with whom I had grown old. There would be no grandchildren, no memories of travel in my golden years, just a void existence. The funny thing is although now I regret my choices, this is the very life of which I dreamed. All of this is before the knock on the door providing the evidence—the painting that set me free.

2

MY CHILDHOOD

Catherine Carnegie, I loved my name. My parents traveled often. No matter, Nellie, our housekeeper and nanny was more than loving enough for my brother Nathaniel and me. We loved her so much. She filled our days with laughter and fun. She was such a counterbalance for our parents. They possessed high

standards, even though Dad was the Harley-riding “black sheep” of the illustrious family. He never changed from his college days, but education was a priority to my parents. The best schools were required for children of their family. Thank goodness Nat and I were both good students. Intelligence was part of our DNA. We excelled at each subject without much study. Early childhood was idyllic.

Our teen years were also joyful times. Both of us were popular, so the social scene in Manhattan allowed us to come out in style. My debutante days still make me smile. I was a good child, which carried into my young teenage days. Filled with my grandfather’s guidance, I stayed on the path of moral integrity. Then college came. I fell from grace. No longer did the light appear in my grandfather’s eye. Instead, he looked pensive when I was around him.

“Oh, Cat, what are you doing? If only you could see where you are headed. I know. You see, I did the same thing. Knowing that you will not listen to me, I still can’t help but try to instruct you. If you are wise, and I know that you are indeed, you will stay on the path you learned in Sunday school. Remember Miss Carol’s words? Please come back to us before it is too late.”

Smiling my most charming smile, I would laugh at him.

“Well, I’m following in your footsteps, I guess. Cut me some slack, Grandfather, I’m not very far away.” Then I would prance out of his presence because he created an uncomfortable feeling in my soul.

My college days, the portal to adulthood at last, the time for making choices of my own couldn’t arrive quickly enough. My family expected me to attend one of the Ivy League colleges as most before me had done, a university of which someone in the family was an alumnus contributing huge amounts of money to insure that the family children received preferential treatment. Secretly, I longed to be a Southern girl. After I read *Gone with the Wind*, my dreams changed. Thoughts of smelling the honeysuckle while walking under the magnolia trees filled my mind. Without a word to anyone, I applied to the University of Alabama. A university well known for sororities and party status, those young women would become the sisters whom I always craved. My parents shook their heads over years of dinners as a youngster when I answered their question with my best Southern accent. That progressed to constant dialogue. Even my “yes” friends told me I was being silly. What good would this accomplish in my life? Born Northern and bred with a pedigree, none of it produced pride. I longed to be Scarlet.

No idea of my treacherous act graced my parents. They had seen the applications to the “approved universities”

but not this one. The day that I found the official envelope lying on the foyer table as I ran inside from tennis, I looked in horror. Surely Nellie had been instructed numerous times that when it arrived, she was to deposit it inside my dresser drawer. Grabbing it as though it was a ransom, I ran up the stairs.

“Your mama put it there. The one day that she picked up the mail. I’m sorry, Miss Catherine.”

I was so excited that I didn’t answer. My heart pounded louder than the heavy footsteps on the marble stairs. Clutching the long overdue reply to my request for admission this fall, I fell onto the bed.

“Please, Lord, please, let me get accepted there. I promise to do my best.” About the only time that I prayed anymore was when I needed something. True to his promise to love and delight his children, God answered my prayer. Carefully opening the letter with shaking hands, happiness flooded my heart. All of those Southern dreams would be fulfilled. The genteel Southern women in Alabama would surely find me different but charming. Thinking of myself as capable of charming a mule, I would fit right into the daily social clamor of my dream university. Scarlet would pale in comparison to my wit and softness. Margaret Mitchell created a disappointment for my family, but I would follow my own dream.

Dinner that night was the perfect occasion to explain my “soon to be disappointed” status, my fall from grace with my family. My brother was staying at Harvard. He was trying to gain acceptance into those sacred halls, but we all knew that was a given for him. His annoying behavior lately of trying to impress our father became sickening to behold. He possessed a different vision, longing to step into Father’s footsteps. A carbon copy of the generations past, he would delight as much as I was about to disappoint.

“Well, there is no easy way to say this, so here goes. I have decided to go to the University of Alabama. Actually, the application was sent months ago. Finally, I received acceptance. My plans are to leave the end of August. It is my wish to pledge. This is my dream. Please be happy for me.” Relaying this shocking announcement with great confidence even though my hands under the table were visibly shaking was a feat for me.

The looks of disdain told me no one was happy. I disappointed my entire family. Yet it was grandfather who I dreaded to face. Mother and Father would come around; they always did. Grandfather stood more difficult. My fickle Southern accent never amused him. Silence prevailed as I waited with a smile, knowing they would understand. How many times had my father been in the hot seat? So I waited for the longest time. Finally, they

looked at each other. Nellie stood behind Dad with a casserole. She did not look pleased either. You really had to mess up to upset her.

“Catherine, you know this is not the path that we would have chosen for you. Still, you are a young lady now, so I feel inclined to allow you mistakes. I certainly have made plenty.” His sadness was obvious, his displeasure certain.

“Your brother made us all proud by his worthy choice of Harvard. I guess one Ivy Leaguer is better than none. Right, Margaret, do you agree?”

Looking at my mother, he then softly asked, “What do you think, Margaret?”

Tears ran down my mother’s cheeks as she looked at me. Softness in her eyes told me that she understood the desire to be different, maybe even to be shocking. She certainly shocked her family through the years.

“Yes, I agree. I’m surprised that you never shared the desire to attend a Southern university with us, Cat. That might have prepared us for this event, but I also understand your desire to be your own person. We can’t stop you. I just hope that you will not come to regret your choice.”

Running to my mother, I bumped into Nellie who spilled the overfilled bowl of vegetables onto the floor. Tears also

ran down Nellie's eyes but for different reasons. Now she was forced to deal with the reality that I would indeed be leaving soon. I would be much farther away than she planned. She smiled her courageous smile, which I loved. Could it be this easy? Was I really about to embark on my seemingly impetuous dream? For a few more moments, there was silence and lowered heads. Nellie, dear, faithful Nellie suddenly grabbed me, hugging me so tightly that I almost choked on her sachet.

"I am proud of you, Miss Catherine. When you get to that dormitory, can I come to visit you? No one in my family ever went to college. At least, you are doing what everyone in my family only dreamed. Can't tell you how proud I am."

Still looking at my father, I mumbled, "Thanks, Nellie."

Then he looked me in the eyes. I saw his smile. The smile I reaped so many times when I thought that I was in serious trouble. His only daughter would not be labeled "renegade." He and Mom hugged me with such love. Soon, I cried with them. For the rest of my days, I remembered that moment. It was a moment of passage as though they were saying finally, *I was an adult*. Although I was responsible for my actions, they would be mine. In my head, I planned my drive down to Alabama. I had never even visited there. It didn't matter to me that I

reached a major decision with little research. It must be as I envisioned— softness, manners, gentility, etiquette, and surrounded by my “sisters.” I couldn’t wait to pack. My luggage waited in the attic for Nellie to bring down. She would clean it, then help me pack.

Of course, I would need many new clothes. How would I decorate my room? Mom and I would have fun choosing those things. Now, how did I tell them that I wanted to drive myself ? Last week was special, my parents bestowed on me a new BMW sedan for graduation. There would be plenty of room for all that I needed to take. It was equipped with GPS so I would not worry over getting lost. Of importance was the fact that I take this leap into adulthood on my own. Would they understand how vital for me to cross the Mason-Dixon Line alone as I found my new calling? How different would the Southern states become as I drove to my fate? Of course, we visited Jekyll Island and Amelia, as well as several others, but that was in my childhood. Now I was an adult. I needed to make this drive unaccompanied. It would be my passage into the person of my future. Excitement filled every pore of my being. Truly, this was adulthood. This was the new me.