



Innocent

Spouse

Carol Ross Joynt

A Memoir

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Carol Ross Joynt



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For Spencer
I thought I was your guide, but as it turned out,
you were my guide, too.

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ONE

Chapter 1

WE WERE STUCK in heavy Friday afternoon rush-hour traffic on M Street, the main thoroughfare in Georgetown. It was January. Everyone was headed home at the same time. I slammed the horn at the slowpoke ahead of me every time he cost me another yellow light. I wasn't panicked, but I was frustrated. We needed to go, not sit at a light. From the backseat my husband, Howard, groaned at every stop, start, lane change, and pothole. He was on his back, gasping for breath, and braced himself with his arms.

We did not talk except for my repeated question, "How are you?" And his faint repeated answer, "Every time you hit a pothole it's a stabbing pain." I listened to the all-news radio station to make sure my route was clear. The announcers' voices droned through news updates, commercial breaks, two-minute interviews, and weather. In a way it was so utterly ordinary—the car, the traffic, the potholes, the radio. We might have been on our way to the supermarket. Except we weren't. We were headed to the emergency room at Sibley Hospital, and I was focused like a laser on the road.

When we pulled into the drive I stopped at the door and jumped out. "I'm gonna get a nurse. I'll be right back." My voice was urgent but calm. Calm enough, anyway. I ran inside, through the lobby and to the desk. "I need a nurse! My husband's in the car. He can barely breathe."

The nurse opened the back door, did a quick survey of Howard, and asked, "Can you walk in or do you need a wheelchair?" He said he could walk. We both helped him out of the car. At six foot three he would have towered over us but he was hunched over in pain. His face was pale. His usually slicked-back silver hair was in disarray. His trousers and sweater were loose.

The nurse bolstered Howard with her shoulder under his arm. Their pace was slow, careful. I left him with her. By the time I parked, gave the admissions clerk the necessary insurance information, and found Howard in the warren of examining rooms, there was an oxygen mask over his face, an IV in his arm, and a young doctor and two nurses hovering over him. His eyes locked with mine. I saw fear. My gut tightened.

"Your husband has bad pneumonia," the doctor said, shoving an X-ray into a wall-mounted light box. His tone was anxious, even a little frazzled. He pointed at the black-and-white picture of my husband's lungs, one quite obviously cloudy and white. "One lung is fully compromised," he said, pointing to the film like a teacher lecturing a class. "We can't let it spread to the other. We're sending him up to the ICU. We have work to do."

I'd brought in a time bomb, but I consoled myself that Howard could talk and his eyes were open. Heck, I thought, people survive pneumonia all the time. Pneumonia is fixable. Maybe he'll be in the hospital a couple of days. He'll learn his lesson about avoiding the doctor until too late.

The medical team disappeared through the drawn white curtain. We were alone. Howard asked for water. "Evian, please."

How sick can he be if he's picky about the water? I stood as close to him as possible, careful not to disturb the tubes and wires. "I'll get some bottled water later. D.C. water will do for now," I said. "This looks like a close call. Thank God I didn't stay longer in New York. Not that it matters now, but I'll never understand why you told me you'd seen Dr. Goldstein." He didn't respond but slowly closed his eyes. He didn't want to hear about it. So I made upbeat small talk. Even though it was loud and crowded in the emergency room, and the curtain was regularly pulled back and closed again by busy nurses and technicians, the moment felt oddly intimate, personal, another experience in our journey together. He was scared and I was there to help take care of him, to calm his fear.

I found a wall phone outside Howard's treatment bay. My first call was to Howard's sister, Martha, in New Castle, Delaware. "I'm at Sibley. Howard has bad pneumonia. That's all I know. They're sending him to the ICU."

She didn't ask any questions. "I'm on my way. It'll probably be three hours."

I called my office at CNN's *Larry King Live*, and talked to the executive producer. "You're not gonna believe this. I'm at Sibley. Howard has bad pneumonia. I found him flat on his back in bed when I got home from New York."

She was alarmed. "What can we do?"

"I don't know," I said. "I'll get back to you."

I made the same call to Nathans, Howard's restaurant in Georgetown. "What can I do?" the manager asked.

"I don't know. Stand by. I'll get back to you."

My last call was the toughest. Home. As we were leaving for the hospital, Howard had paused only long enough to poke his head in on our smiling five-year-old son, playing on the floor of his room with the babysitter. "I'll be back, big guy," he said. I gave the babysitter the update and asked to speak to Spencer.

There was something about that little voice at the other end of the line that underscored my altered reality. Spencer seemed so far removed from the drama involving his parents, but it would soon become his drama, too. Blessedly, I suppose, he was too young to understand where I was, what had happened, and what it meant, and therefore at this point it could not scare him. "I'm at the hospital with Daddy," I said. "There are lots of nice doctors and nurses."

"Mommy, are the doctors going to fix him?" He knew Howard was not well. After all, for the four days I was away Howard had been home in bed.

“Yes, sweetie. The doctors are going to make him all better. You should have your dinner and get ready for bed, and I’ll be there as soon as possible.”

“Okay, Mommy. Can I talk to Daddy?”

“Soon, but not right now. He’s taking a nap. That’s how they fix him.”

“Okay, Mommy.”

Howard was whisked up to the ICU. Bright lights flooded the room. There were two windows, one with the blinds shut, the other facing the nursing station. There was a lot of equipment, most of it hooked up to him. One of the machines beeped constantly, flashing numbers. He had an IV, possibly two. He was in a gown, under white sheets, propped up by pillows. Was I afraid? No, not then. Not yet. Howard was awake, after all. He talked to me through his oxygen mask. I wet washcloths with cold water, squeezed them out, and pressed them against his forehead. There were lots of people fussing with him. Something was being done. I said to myself, “This is bad for him but routine for them. He’ll be here a couple nights and then home.”

What did I know?

We had gotten to the hospital at five in the afternoon. Very quickly it was pushing nine. The nurse called in a new doctor, who arrived in shirtsleeves and tie but no jacket or white coat. He was friendly but instantly serious when he looked at Howard’s charts and machines. His one good lung was not absorbing enough oxygen. In a whisper, out of Howard’s range, I asked the nurse, “Is this serious?”

She nodded. “We’ve got to get his blood oxygen up.” She pointed to an “85” on the monitor.

“So he’s in serious condition?”

Her voice went flat. “No, he’s critical.”

I turned to the sink and splashed water on my face. It was the only way to hide the rush of tears. The fear arrived with a jolt and made me queasy, woozy, unsteady. My breath stopped somewhere near my breastbone. My mouth was dry. But I couldn’t let myself become unhinged in front of Howard. Composure was essential. I inhaled as deeply as I could, wiped my face, wet another washcloth, turned, and went to him, pressing it against his cheeks and brow. I looked him in the eyes, the beautiful brown eyes I’d known and loved for twenty years. I could see the same fear. “This is no way to spend Friday night,” he said.

“It’s going to be okay,” I said. “You’re in good hands and Martha is on her way. She’ll be here so I can go check on Spencer. You won’t be alone.”

The doctor called me outside. His hands were on his hips, head tilted down toward me, expression engaged but grim. “We have to sedate him. We have to get a tube down into his good lung to get more oxygen into him. I don’t know if it will work but we’ve got to give it a try.” He didn’t call it life support, but that’s what it was. I behaved calmly, but by then I was functioning on pure adrenaline.

Back at Howard’s bedside, the doctor explained the procedure to him while the nurses prepared to put him under. No one offered us a moment alone, nor

did we ask for one. It didn't seem necessary. This was still so simple. They would sedate him, do their work, fix him, and he'd be better. I kissed him awkwardly on the arm or shoulder—whatever part of him it was I could reach—and asked if there was anything I could bring him from home, anything he wanted me to do. His look was woeful. “I want to be back in the Caribbean.”

“Yes,” I said. “Me, too.” I blew him another kiss, grabbed my coat, and headed out the door.

Chapter 2

A MONTH EARLIER WE had been sailing in the Caribbean on a sixty-three-foot sloop. Her sails were up and full. She yawed softly. The air smelled salty sweet. During a night sail the water splashed the hull and spilled away in twinkling phosphorescence. As I lay on the deck, the rich indigo of the sky mesmerized me. Howard was beside me, his hand in mine. Spencer slept in his bunk below. Stars crowded the sky, brilliant and wondrous. The breeze, a steady twelve to fifteen knots, filled the big jib. The boat was following a northerly course, away from the sandbar island of Barbuda toward the more volcanic and mountainous St. Bart's. We could see the shadowed hulk of St. Kitts on the western horizon.

I knew that sky and I knew those waters. I'd lived in the Caribbean for a while before I met Howard, and after we married we returned together many times. This was our first trip with our son. To our delight he took to the surf and sand and steel drums like an island native. He responded to the motion of the boat, the pitch and roll and heel, like a seasoned deckhand. I sighed and squeezed Howard's hand. We shared so much happiness—our love for each other, our son, that night, that place, and those lovely, soothing sounds. My head found its familiar spot on his shoulder.

Howard was the embodiment of the irresistible rogue. He wore money well—with the distinguished good looks, grace, and style of a rakish prince, underscored by just enough pirate to seem slightly dangerous. That was what had initially attracted me, but I loved him for so much more. I was drawn to his dash, of course, but there was intelligence shielded behind that glossy veneer. He had a remarkable BS detector, which was useful in the bar business and impressive to me. Over the years I watched as he unerringly called out various posers and charlatans. He had a keen business sense and the math skills of an accountant. Some would say he was too smart to own a bar, but maybe that was the point.

Away from work, Howard knew and loved history and art and had a well-read appreciation for design. He could stand in an art gallery and zero in on the one true gem. A frustrated landscape architect—what he would have studied in college had his father not rejected the pursuit as “sissy”—he loved to research, plant, and tend gardens. He could recite virtually every variety of daffodil, his favorite flower. He was also a handyman who could get down on his hands and knees to fix the kitchen sink. He was sincerely thoughtful toward others, though he was not a schmoozer. He had a sense of duty—to his parents, his sister, and to my family—which awed me because my family was

not that way. When I had a bad day he made it his project to lift my spirits. He made me feel safe and secure and adored. I was serenely happy to be his wife. I believed that without him I could not exist.

On the other hand, he was catnip to women and he knew it; he had lived a life of so much privilege that the rules of law were a gray area; he too often confused material luxury with love, and his personal motto was “Anything worth doing is worth overdoing.”

Still, he was my knight in shining armor.

“I am the happiest I have ever been in my whole life,” I said to him. Right there, right then, I had everything I wanted in the world.

HOWARD AND I had met two decades earlier at an after-hours party at Clyde’s, a Georgetown bar a block away from Nathans, its chief competitor. Nathans and Clyde’s were founded a few years apart in the 1960s. Both were legends in the Washington, D.C. bar business—just like their owners. Stuart Davidson, who owned Clyde’s, and Howard, who owned Nathans, were gentlemen saloon owners, which meant they didn’t need the work or the money. Howard’s father was a successful patent lawyer who had secured rights for windfall American staples such as the parking meter and stainless steel, and his wife was a rare-books expert and had a famed collection of eighteenth-century American furniture and art. A Washington native, Howard preferred New York, especially the bars on the Upper East Side along Second and Third avenues. He’d been a denizen of that scene after a year or so of college. When Howard returned to Washington, his father wanted him to find a job.

“You seem to like to spend a lot of time in bars,” his father had said to Howard, “so you might as well own one.” With that, Mr. Joynt paid off two partners and bought Nathans for Howard, who made it a rumpus room for trust-fund prepster types, celebrities, the social, the powerful, and anybody else who wanted to join the party. He styled Nathans as a homage to his two favorite New York haunts, P. J. Clarke’s and the 21 Club. The logo was a jockey on a racehorse. The cover of the matchboxes showed a bottle of Dom Pérignon beside a rubrum lily.

The restaurant business provided the perfect stage for Howard’s larger-than-life character: tall, lean, with a natural virility, his hair slicked back and curling at the collar, his brown eyes and serious eyebrows, the strong and purposeful chin, the tailored suits, the perfectly knotted Hermès ties, the polished Gucci slip-ons. Any room picked up when he walked in. A few glasses of vintage wine or cognac only heightened his effect. He could be a lover and friend to women, but men, too, heartily enjoyed his company. He had the gift for making any conversation about the other person, not himself. He could charm anybody, and usually did.

He smoked cigarettes, Kents, with the panache of an uptown gangster in a ’40s-era film noir. He could talk like one, too. With his deep gravel and sandpaper voice, he was fresh off the pages of Damon Runyon. If the engine

on his vintage twelve-cylinder Jaguar XKE didn't turn over, it was "deader than Kelso's nuts." When he wanted something fast, it had to happen "in a New York minute." He comfortably talked the talk with Madison Avenue antiques dealers and always impressed them with his seasoned eye for what was good; handled appointments with his tailor as a necessity not an indulgence; and fit in as well with the bookies at the bar (after all, he got Nathans in part due to a bookie's gambling debt) as he did with the café society types with whom he sometimes jetted about. He cussed a blue streak, but not in front of women or children. It was second nature for him to offer a woman a seat, pull out her chair, open her door, or send her flowers and thoughtful gifts. He combined a salty swagger with refined good manners at a time when manners like his were becoming as rare as his parents' antiques.

Howard liked the good life and he introduced me to it. I'd never before experienced anyone quite like him—he swept me off my feet. He was a character from the movies: the legendary New York restaurateur Toots Shor as played by a combination of Cary Grant and Jack Nicholson. At the party where we met, the jaunty way he arrived—in his tuxedo, tie hanging loose—turned my head. No way was this man a lawyer or government worker or lobbyist. He had a devilish gleam in his eye as he scanned the room. He set his bemused smile on me and walked over. "Where's the champagne?" he asked. I gestured behind me. "Can I get you a glass?" he offered. I nodded.

Howard had come to Clyde's from a formal dinner party at the home of a rich young socialite. I had arrived straight from eight hours under the fluorescent lights at the NBC News Washington Bureau, where I worked the late shift as the night assignment editor. It was 1977, and in the spirit of the times I was dressed in the androgynous style of Mick Jagger—chic Soho thrift-shop trousers and a bomber jacket, my dark brown hair in a chin-length bob. I'd been in Washington only a few months. I'd spent four years in New York as Walter Cronkite's writer at CBS News, covering Watergate, the Nixon resignation, and the end of the Vietnam War. I loved it, but after those nonstop New York years, when I turned twenty-five I checked out for a year to pursue another passion: crewing on sailboats in the West Indies and France. I was freshly back and ambitious to succeed in my news career. I was proud of what I'd accomplished with my life. I wasn't sheltered or unsophisticated about the world, or at least I didn't think so. I'd been on my own since high school. I thought I was fairly savvy. But Howard, at thirty-eight, was savvier.

At his invitation we left the party together. He helped me into his shiny black Jaguar sedan and we sped off into the balmy spring night. On the car stereo the Eagles sang "Life in the Fast Lane." I fastened my seat belt.

"You're a strange one," he said. "Why haven't I met you before?"

"I just moved back here. I work the late shift and don't get out much."

In 1977 I owned nothing but an assortment of eccentric but trendy clothing, a suitcase, a black-and-white TV, and a one-LP record player. I camped in a studio apartment. Literally. My home décor was L.L.Bean, my "end tables" cardboard boxes. I slept in a sleeping bag on a cot. The refrigerator held a few

bottles of Korbel sparkling wine and that was it. I was a vegetarian and swam for a half hour every day, but would party till dawn if the party was good enough. My network TV salary was good. I easily paid rent, bought stuff, took trips, went out with friends. I had one credit card, a checking account, and no savings. I had no one to support but me. I had no responsibilities, no strings. Howard played in a different league.

From the party in Georgetown we headed to another restaurant he owned, Nathans II. It was downtown and, with dinner service over, closed for the night. He unlocked the door and turned on a light switch that brought the spacious, elegant room to life. He walked me over to the black lacquered bar, opened a bottle of Dom Pérignon, and poured two glasses. He stood behind the bar, hitched his foot up on the beer cooler, and cocked his glass toward me.

“To the strange one,” he said.

Strange? Maybe. I didn’t see myself that way, but I knew I didn’t fit the mold for Washington, which tilted strongly toward buttoned-up and conservative. Professionally, in an important job at a network news bureau, I played by the rules of the town’s mainstream. But after life in New York, and time in the Caribbean and Europe, I was easily seduced by what was outside the box. Howard Joynt was outside the box. With his elegant suits and distinguished good looks he may have looked like he was on the conventional Washington team, but I sensed his subversive soul from the start.

From his smart tuxedo jacket Howard pulled out the fattest joint I’d ever seen, lit it, and offered me a hit. Weed wasn’t my particular habit but I wasn’t averse to it. Most of what I smoked was my brother’s homegrown, which was the 3.2 beer of marijuana. Howard’s grass, on the other hand, was fully loaded. “It’s Thai stick,” he said. “You sure you can handle it?”

“Oh sure,” I said. “Of course.” I inhaled deeply. When it hit me I almost took a header off the barstool.

On that first evening we talked all night, and we continued to talk for the next two weeks. When I got off work at eleven, he would be waiting in his Jaguar outside NBC’s front doors to whisk us off to what was then the chicest restaurant in town, the Jockey Club, which looked and felt like the 21 Club and was open late. I felt sophisticated, out among the grown-ups. At every other table were Washington movers and shakers I recognized from the news I’d covered that day or from the gossip columns. We talked through dinner. Then, after hours at his bar, alone or with a ragtag group of bookies and well-funded drunks, or in his car driving until dawn with no particular destination, we continued to talk. I was not involved with anyone at the time. He told me he was in the midst of a divorce from his second wife, with two young sons. I didn’t like that he wasn’t yet divorced, but he assured me that he would be soon. The coast was clear, or so I thought.

We were alone at Nathans II in the wee hours of the morning on one of these early occasions when he came up behind me, put his hands on my shoulders, and whispered in my ear, “I think I’m falling in love with you.” The

words wrapped me in a soft, warm blanket. I fell back into his strong arms and savored the most profound feeling of belonging. For my heart he felt like home. Nothing else mattered.

Two weeks after we met, we made love for the first time. The next day he moved into the Madison Hotel, the most exclusive in Washington at the time. To celebrate his first night there, he took me to the hotel's dining room, the Montpelier Room, where the waiters treated him—as did the waiters at the Jockey Club—as if he were James Bond. He ordered Dom Pérignon and a tin of Iranian Beluga Malossol caviar, which he spread on toast points, spritzed with lemon, and fed to me. He didn't do this as a phony playing a role. It was as natural to him as breathing air. If that was our first date, and surely glamorous, our second date showed me more of the man I would come to love so dearly. He took me to Colonial Williamsburg—yes, a touristy museum town—to share with me his affection for all things eighteenth-century American, particularly the architecture and gardens. We walked leafy historic streets hand in hand, watched the Fifes and Drums perform at day's end, and drank cider with our crab and ham.

A few days later I gave up my studio apartment, packed my things, discarded the camping gear, and moved in with Howard at the Madison Hotel. I was a kid in the candy store of love. He'd send flowers, champagne, even caviar (with toast) to NBC. He'd call one, two, three times when I still had hours to go before my workday ended. "How many minutes until you get off work? I can't wait for you to get here. I'll send a car to pick you up. Just come in the room, don't say a word, let me make love to you." Sure enough, as I walked out the door at eleven, there would be a driver holding open the door to a black sedan. I was swept away by this unending cornucopia of affection.

At the hotel, Howard was always as good as his word. With very few exceptions, we shared the same bed every night for two decades.

After we had settled in, he told me that his divorce hadn't actually begun until the week after we met. He brushed it away with a wave of his hand. "It was coming, regardless. Strange One, you aren't to blame. You're just the catalyst for what I already wanted to do."

I didn't like it, but I had no clear idea what to do about the situation. I could have walked out the door, but I didn't. Howard had lied to me, but I knew from experience that people in the first flush of love say all kinds of things they'd like to be true but, in fact, are not. It was his marriage and his divorce and he'd been down that road before. None of my business. I was madly in love, and as everybody knows, love is blind—and sometimes a bit dumb. With little regard for judgment or common sense, I signed myself over to him. His divorce was granted within the year, and we eventually married. I quit my job at NBC News and our love nest became the manor house of a five-hundred-acre farm an hour from the city in Upperville, Virginia, the heart of the hunt country. I had visions of foxes and hounds and hunt breakfasts and witty repartee with the landed gentry. The reality was different. We spent

most of our time together, whole days and weeks, which was fine, but it narrowed our landscape. Even wrapped head to toe in Ralph Lauren, I didn't fit in with the horse-farm trust-fund crowd, nor did I want to. I was a middle-class girl with a work ethic. With a few exceptions, no one we knew did anything. I was interested in the world. They were interested in horses, land, and one another. Some were flat-out bigots. The countryside was beautiful, our home was a dream, but my brain was slowly dying.

Howard wasn't happy, either, and he succumbed easily to disturbingly dark moods. Nathans II failed and closed, leaving only the original in Georgetown. Too much weed, too much alcohol, too little to do, and he would transform from Dr. Jekyll into Mr. Hyde. For every lark that was a "high"—good living, good times, good travel—there would be the inevitable "down." Benders happened. Rage happened, too. He'd have sudden meltdowns. He became abusive and cruel. On occasion, out of the blue, he hit me. More often he was plain out of control. He locked me out of the house. He pushed me out of the car one night in a rainstorm, miles from home, without money or identification. A stranger who saw me crying at a pay telephone drove me home, forty minutes away. My problem was I never saw the meltdowns coming. He could go to dinner five times, have wine, and remain charming, loving, and completely normal. And then there would be that sixth time, where mid-dinner or mid-party he'd suddenly turn an invisible corner, cross an unseen line, and change: not able to stop drinking, aggressive, and crazy, as if invaded by an alien—an alien who hated himself and anyone in proximity, chiefly me.

Howard would recover from the episodes and return to his other wonderful self, not remembering any of the gory details, while I'd remember all of them. He'd make up for it with affectionate words of contrition and gifts. A handful of Anna Weatherley dresses would arrive, boxes of beautiful silk chiffon as delicate as cotton candy, a ring from Tiffany, a necklace from Cartier, and I, reluctant to say "No, thank you" and happy to have the storm over, would accept the gifts and his apology. I would invent one story or another to explain away a black eye. My seemingly confident exterior fooled so many. I told no one what was really happening, not even my closest friends. Who would believe me? I could hear them: "Not Howard! That's not possible." Besides, where would I go? I had no one but him, or so I thought, and I'd brought this on myself. I was becoming the classic abused wife.

Howard was my entire world, and when his mood was dark, my world was dark. I was stranded in bizarre splendor in a grand house at the end of a long dirt road surrounded by fields and foxhunters. It was a million miles from the world I had left. Eventually I fell apart, what they used to call a "nervous breakdown." I had disappeared as a person. I was invisible. I was Mrs. John Howard Joynt III, but Carol Ross had left the planet. My self-esteem was zero. At one point I curled up in a closet—not a walk-in—wanting everything just to go away. The outside world appeared not to notice—I was always good at maintaining a façade—but I did. I knew it. I was living it. I was hating it.

I confided to my physician one day in a routine exam and he sent me to a psychiatrist. Through weekly therapy, I gradually worked my way back to solid ground. Howard followed me into therapy with the same doctor. We saw him at different times on different days. It may seem strange that we shared the same shrink, but it worked. Chronic depression was fueling his manic ups and downs. The doctor put him on Prozac and, just like that, he was transformed. The dark side of Howard retreated, and the bright, happy, charming side—the side I had fallen in love with—became the constant. It was an astonishing turn and convinced me ours was a marriage worth saving.

“We’ve got to get back to the world,” I told Howard in the den of our house in Upperville. We’d lived there for seven years in what was more a hideout than a home. “I have to go back to work. You have to go back to work, too.” He agreed. He’d neglected Nathans, leaving it in the hands of managers and bartenders. No one was minding the store. He hired Pinkerton detectives, whose investigation revealed that the staff was stuffing dollars in their pockets—tens of thousands of dollars—selling cocaine across the bar, and walking out the back door with whatever they wanted. It was time for both of us to go back to work.

My career was built on curiosity, instinct, and asking questions, and yet I never once questioned our life of quiet luxury. I’d grown up in an emotionally chaotic household where I’d rarely felt like I was on firm footing. I loved my parents dearly but I had moved out of their home the moment I could, at age eighteen, and embarked on a good career. But when I met Howard, and even though I had living parents, brothers, and a sister, I felt somehow like an orphan. Howard adopted me, took me in, and put a secure roof over my head, and in spite of the fighting made me feel safe, protected, secure, and loved. I traded in my self-respect to preserve that fragile deception. Not his. My own. If my house was a house of cards, I didn’t want to know about it.

The second decade of our marriage was better, and it kept getting better with each passing year. I had begun to assert myself. I became again the master of my own life. We packed up and moved to the Chesapeake Bay while keeping a small apartment in Georgetown. We were water people. We liked to sail. Howard jumped back into the day-to-day management of Nathans, and I returned to television as a producer for the CBS News overnight broadcast, *Nightwatch*, hosted by Charlie Rose. I loved being back at work, sharing my days with people like me who were involved in the world, excited by it.

Who wouldn’t be? In the first years of my career, at United Press International, I had stood mere yards from President Johnson soon after he announced he would not seek reelection. Helen Thomas included me on a visit to President Nixon’s “hideaway” office in the Old Executive Office Building where he sat at his desk and talked about the bombing of Cambodia. In my next job, with *Time* magazine, I asked Elvis Presley what he was doing after his show. “I don’t know, baby,” he said. “If ya tell me where you’ll be, I’ll tell ya what I’ll be doin’.” Also at *Time*, I went to my first presidential conventions and on the road with Jane Fonda and Tom Hayden at the height

of their antiwar activism. In various jobs I met all the presidents of my time: Gerald Ford, Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan, Bill Clinton, and both of the presidents Bush. With Larry King, I met Elizabeth Taylor, Princess Diana, and John F. Kennedy, Jr., who did a live interview while I kept company with Carolyn Bessette.

The New York socialite C. Z. Guest, one of Truman Capote's favored "swans," agreed to do an interview with Larry about the Duke and Duchess of Windsor for the auction of their possessions. Sotheby's invited me to bring C.Z. to their warehouse to go over the items. She met me looking like a glass of lemonade, all sparkling and fresh and blond. Not for nothing was she on the best-dressed list year after year. The warehouse held vast rooms of furniture, racks of clothing, boxes filled with bed linens. While the staff was coding and tagging, C.Z. and I wandered unattended, fingering suits, jackets, dresses, the Windsors' stuffed Pug dolls, their silver. There was the duke's "abdication desk," and his much-photographed greatcoat. C.Z. pulled it on, smiled, and twirled. It looked made for her.

This was fun, some of it was fascinating, and all of it sure beat living the idle life. The one interview I didn't want to touch was Charles Manson, the truly sick mastermind behind the grisly 1969 murders of Sharon Tate, the actress and Roman Polanski's wife, along with four others in Polanski's Los Angeles home. John Huddy, executive producer at CBS News *Nightwatch*, pushed me into it. I balked, but he called me his "star" producer and told me this was a professional step I needed to take, so I made a call to the warden of San Quentin. He said Manson was permitted to do one interview per quarter. "It's up to him. You have to write him directly." He gave me a prison address.

For the next year, Manson and I exchanged letters. Mine were typed and antiseptic. I was careful not to fall into the usual fawning that went with pursuing a big "get." Manson's letters to me, on the other hand, were wild and required several readings to decipher. They went on for pages and pages, written with a pencil in longhand on yellow legal paper. One day the warden phoned. "Manson has agreed to an interview."

In February 1987, Charlie Rose and I—and Howard—flew to San Francisco. I gave Charlie the "prep packet" of all my notes from interviews with prosecutors, forensic psychiatrists, and others. I'd also asked him to read Vincent Bugliosi's *Helter Skelter*. When we arrived at San Quentin no two people were more read up on Charles Manson. There was no way not to be anxious as we went through three gates and listened to a recitation of the prison's "no hostage" policy ("We will not negotiate your safety for the freedom of an inmate...."). Gulp. I had purposely dressed down. White shirt, gray pants, no jewelry, no makeup. Charlie Rose wore a suit. The two of us and the two-man crew were taken to the large parole hearing room, with a big wooden conference table and windows with a stunning view of San Francisco Bay.

Guards led Manson in, shackled at the wrists and ankles. He was slight, weighed down by the chains that wrapped around his waist. His skin had the

pallor of milk—skin that never sees sunlight. He was kept in solitary; he wouldn't have lasted long in the general population. I asked the guards to remove the shackles, thinking that might make him more comfortable and easier to interview. We introduced ourselves. I didn't know whether to shake his hand, and then I did. "We'll start in a few minutes," I said, "if you'd like some time to relax." He walked over to the window and stood stock still, staring out at the world he had left forever, the sparkling blue bay drenched in sunlight and dotted with sailboats.

Once the interview began, we stopped only for Skip Brown, the cameraman, to make quick tape changes. Manson began calmly, but as time was running out he got more animated and explosive, eventually becoming barely coherent. And then it was over. He was shackled again and the guards led him away, his chains clanking. The program aired within days of the interview. Later that year Charlie Rose and I stepped up to the stage at New York's Waldorf Astoria to accept Emmy Awards for best network interview. Not even a year spent pursuing Elizabeth Taylor could top that.

From CBS News I went to the start-up of the television version of *USA Today*, where I was Washington bureau chief; the show failed but I learned a lot. Then it was on to producer roles at *This Week with David Brinkley*, and *Nightline* at ABC News. Working with Ted Koppel was the closest I'd come to an experience that matched the excellence of Walter Cronkite. These were great jobs and my career blossomed. But I was forty years old and eager to get pregnant, which is tough when you work for a show like *Nightline*, where the workday ended at midnight and began with an early morning conference call. A sensible interlude followed at the National Gallery of Art, where I was brought in by director J. Carter Brown to make documentary films. The hours were essentially nine to five.

Meanwhile, business was booming at Nathans. Howard and I focused on making our house on the Chesapeake into the home of our dreams. When I didn't think life could get any sweeter, I became pregnant and it did. Spencer was born in November 1991, when I was forty-one and Howard was fifty-three. It was the right time. We were ready. After Spencer's birth, our life together became a succession of quiet but very happy rewards. Like so many baby boomers, we replaced the all-nighters and nightclubbing and madcap adventure with the simple pleasures of home and hearth. Howard quit smoking. He grew a slight paunch. His hair turned silver. We woke up early and went to bed early. We were a family, and as we sailed through the Caribbean islands that December we seemed as solid and happy as we had ever been.