

# *Feathers in the Wind*

## *By Lynn Case*

(Excerpt from Chapter 4)

It was less than twenty minutes before the local police had arrived and accessed the scene. The detective assigned to the case quickly arrived at the scene and began ordering the other officers to corner off the area and check for finger prints on everything.

"Mrs. Worthington." Detective Bryce grumbled as he came into the living room where everyone was seated. "I would like to speak with you in private."

"Ah, yes, we can use the office." Catherine replied showing the detective the way to SJ's office.

Detective Bryce followed her into the office and slid the door closed behind them. Catherine took a seat in SJ's chair as the detective stood across the desk from her note book and pen in hand, and was ready to take notes.

"Can you tell me who was in the house today?" The detective asked.

"There were well over a few hundred people in and out of the house today." Catherine replied. "Today was my husband's funeral."

"Oh?" He replied then paused for a few moments as he made a note in his little black notebook. "I'm sorry for your loss Mrs. Worthington. I wasn't aware." He replied looking up sympathetically from his note pad. "How did he die? If you don't mind me asking?"

"Heart attack the hospital said." Catherine said with tears beginning to well up in her eyes. "You can check with Midtown Memorial hospital."

"I'm sure that won't be necessary." The detective replied. Just then a police women entered the office and whispered in his hear. Then turned and left the room as quickly as she had come. "Can you tell me where you were at about four thirty this afternoon?"

"Four thirty?" Catherine had to think for a few moments. "Oh, yes I remember now. We were in this very room for a reading of SJ's will."

"Who is we?" He replied sternly.

"Well for started there was Bernard and Mariam, the two in the broom closet." Catherine replied.

"Maribeth, Tessa and Joel Worthington my step children. Maribeth is in the living room but Tessa and Joel left abruptly after the reading of the will. There are a few of my friends from out of town. Allison Simms, Lillian Anderson and Gabrielle Grimaldi. Oh and George Putnam, my husband's lawyer."

"Anyone else in the house at the time?" He asked. Still writing down the names she had already given him.

"There were a few remaining catering staff members cleaning up. You will have to check with the catering company as to their names." Catherine replied.

"A place this big is bound to have security cameras, do you?" He asked.

"Yes, we do actually." Catherine replied. "Quite a few of them as a matter of fact."

"I will need the recordings before I leave if that possible?" He requested firmly in a not really a request tone of voice, more of a demand.

The detective continued to ask a few more general questions before allowing her to return to the living room where the next person went into the office behind closed doors.

It wasn't until late that evening that the questioning was all done, for the most part, and the coroner had removed Bernard and Mariam's bodies from the kitchen. The crime scene technicians were just about finished finger printing every space imaginable.

Everyone left as soon as they were questioned, except for Gabrielle, as she was staying in the house with Catherine until her flight back home later that week.

The detective walked out of the office still writing things down in his small notepad. Then looked up and faced the two women sitting in the living room.

"That's about all we can do for now." The detective said. "We will have to wait for the autopsy reports and the results from the lab to see if we have any leads."

"Is that all?" Gabrielle asked the detective. "Isn't there anything else that can be done to see who killed this nice old couple?"

The detective just looked up at Gabrielle without saying a word, then turned to Catherine and handed her his card. "If you think of anything else, please give me a call at this number. My personal cell number is on the back. Oh and if I could have those security records?"

"I already gave them to Officer Dunn." Catherine said looking past detective Bryce at the officer standing behind him.

"Got them right here detective." The officer replied showing him a small pocket drive with the recordings.

"We will review these and get back to you if we need any clarification." Said the detective. The two men turned and walked out the front door closing it behind them.

It had been more than a week since SJ's passing. Allison had to get back home to San Diego and her students. Lillian had patients she needed to return to in Washington so she was only able to get away for a few days. Gabrielle remained behind to help her take care of SJ's belongs. Along with help from Maribeth the three were able to pack up all of SJ's personal belongings and place them in storage.

George advised her to go through his things as soon as possible and get things squared away as it would be harder to do later on. So she reluctantly took his advice.

One morning Catherine and Gabrielle were sitting at the breakfast nook having their morning coffee and trying to wake up after a late night of packing things up in boxes.

"What are you going to do with yourself now that you are no longer the stay at home trophy wife?" Gabrielle asked her friend. Concerned that she may start to wither away if she didn't find a purpose in her life soon.

"I don't know about the trophy wife comment, but I'm really not sure what I am going to do." Catherine replied putting her cup down on the table. "I know I don't want to rattle around this old mansion by myself with a daily reminder of who I was and what I lost."

"Why don't you sell it?" Gabrielle asked. "Or see if Maribeth wants to keep it in the family since this is where they grew up."

"That's not a half bad idea." Catherine looked up at her friend with a smile. "Not a bad idea at all. Especially after the murders. We, rather I have a friend that is a real estate broker. I should give her a call and just see what the old girl is up to and see if she can handle it for me. In the mean time I will ask Maribeth if she would be interested in it, just in case."

"Here's to moving on!" Gabrielle said raising her cup to Catherine.

Just then the phone rang. Catherine rose from the table and picked up the handheld sitting on the kitchen counter.

"Hello?" She said into the receiver.

"Mrs. Worthington?" Said a man's voice. "This is Detective Bryce."

“Yes Detective, what can I do for you?” Catherin replied.

“After reviewing your security tapes, I have a few questions for you. May I come by this afternoon?”

“This afternoon?” Catherine said looking over at Gabrielle and shrugging her shoulders. “Sure, I suppose that would be alright. Can we say about three o’clock?”

“See you then.” He said then hung up the phone.

Catherine turned the hand set over in her hand, looked at it confused and then placed it back on the counter.

“What was that all about?” Gabrielle asked taking a sip from her drink.

“I’m not sure.” Catherine replied as she returned to the table where they were sitting. “Detective Bryce reviewed the security tapes and wants to talk to me about them. I wonder what they showed, maybe the killer.”

“Hmmm” Gabrielle replied raising an eyebrow “You’ll have to let me know what he says.”

Catherine drove Gabrielle to the airport that next day as her flight back home was leaving at noon. Then she was meeting her real estate broker, Paulette Blacjart around one o'clock at the house to do a walk through, see what the house was worth and if any work needed to be done before putting it on the market.

Seeing Gabrielle off at the airport was like the final goodbye to her friends. Catherine now felt she was really all alone. Her fiends all back doing their things with their lives and SJ gone, she had no one. Since SJ had children they decided not to have any. A decision Catherine now regretted making.

She made her way back to the house driving through the city streets almost as if she was on autopilot. She was in a dream state as she passed places that SJ and she used to frequent. The French Bistro on the corner, the little Italian place on the corner of Fourth and Main streets. The owners knew them by their first names.

Catherine pulled into the circle driveway and parked the car near the door. She was almost at the front door when a black SUV pulled up behind her. She stood at the doorway for a moment to see who was getting out of it. The sun was in her eyes as she could see a women get out of the car and that’s about all.

"Hello, can I help you?" Catherine asked holding her hand up to try and block some of the afternoon sun from her eyes.

"Catherine, it's me, Paulette Blacjart." The women replied stepping closing to her so she could see.

"Oh, Paulette." Catherine replied relaxing a bit, "you got a new car since I saw you last. I didn't recognize it." Catherine replied opening the door so the two of them could enter the foyer.

"Well" Catherine began as they enter the house. "As you can see nothing has changed since the funeral. SJ always liked to keep the house in pretty good order."

Paulette sat her bag down on a table in the foyer and picked up her clipboard that had a few forms attached to it. "Mind if I just wander around and take some notes and measurements?" She asked.

"No problem, you know where everything is by now." Catherine said with a grin. "Take your time I have no place to go the rest of the day. Just come find me if you get lost or need anything."

The phone began to ring in SJ's office, now her office. Catherine walked quickly over to it and picked it up.

"Hello?" She said into the receiver.

"So now you're picking up Daddy's office phone?" A female voice on the other end said in a sour caustic tone. "Didn't take you long to move into his office."

It was Tessa, trying to start another argument. "What do you want Tessa" Catherine asked trying to be hospitable.

"I was leaving a message for Mr. Putnam. I know he is monitoring all of Daddy's calls now." Tessa replied in her never changing tone.

"You need to call him at his office as I am having this line transferred over there." Catherine advised here. "The line should be transferred next week as the house will be up for sale."

"What!" Tessa yelled into the phone. "You're selling our home? No one told me of this. Who gives you the right to sell our childhood home?"

"Maribeth knew about it. If she didn't tell you then that is between you and her." Catherine replied "Now I have to go, the real estate broker is roaming around the estate unattended."

Click was all Tessa heard even before she could say anything else. She immediately called Joel and told him of Catherine's plan to sell the family estate. They agreed to get together and make a plan to stop her the following day.

It was almost three o'clock and she was expecting the detective any moment. Catherine sat down at SJ's desk for a moment and took a deep breath. Just as she was exhaling, she heard a car pull up the drive. She glanced out the window and seen that it was a black sedan with dark tinted windows.

"That must be the detective?" She said to herself as she got up and made her way to the front door to let him in. Catherine opened the door just as the detective was stepping on the porch.

"Good afternoon Detective Bryce." Catherine said as she held the door open for him to enter.

He stepped in taking off his hat. "Sorry to disturb you, but I have a few questions for you. Can we talk somewhere private?" He asked, as he seen the realtor walking around taking measurements.

"Ah, sure." Catherine replied. "Let's use SJ's office." She said pointing to the door to the left.

Detective Bryce made his way to the office followed closely by Catherine, who closed the doors behind them. "Please have a seat detective." She said as she walked around the desk and took a seat in SJ's chair.

Detective Bryce laid a file folder on her desk and opened it up and flipped over the first piece of paper in the file. "Do you recognize this person?" He asked as he pointed to a photo of person in dark clothing. The photo was obviously a snap shot taken from a security camera. Catherine recognized the landscaping in the background to be their back yard patio.

"No, I can't say that I do." Catherine replied after taking a close look at the photo. "Were you able to get any pictures of his face?" Catherine asked the detective.

"No, unfortunately not." He replied "This photo was captured on the security camera on your patio the night your husband died. See the time stamp in the corner?" He said pointing to some markings on the lower right of the photo. "This was taken around five o'clock that evening. What time did you say your husband died?"

"We had dinner on the patio sometime around six o'clock that evening. He fell ill not long after that. He died at the hospital." Catherine replied solemnly.

Detective Bryce pulled his notebook from his breast pocket and flipped back a few pages. He stopped on one page and read something rather quickly. "You stated that your husband died of a heart attack, is that correct?" He asked.

"Yes, that's what the doctor at the hospital said, why do you ask?" Catherine asked curiously.

The detective didn't answer he just leaned forward and flipped over the next page in the folder. "Do you recognize this person?" He said pointing to another photo of a person dressed in dark clothing. In this photo. The shadowy figure was walking out their kitchen door onto their patio and seemed to be turning left to go around the house.

"No, still no picture of his face?" Catherine asked.

"Mrs. Worthington I am going to, with your permission of course, have your husband grave exhumed and I am going to request an autopsy." Detective Bryce informed her. "I think we might be dealing with a murder not a death by natural causes.

Catherine sat back in her chair staring at the shadowy figure in the photo on the desk.

"Mrs. Worthington?" the detective said "Do I have your permission to exhume your husband grave?"

Catherine sat there dumbfounded. "How and why would someone want to kill SJ?" She asked herself.

"Mrs. Worthington?" He asked again.

"Uh?" Catherine replied still staring at the photo. "Oh, yes. You have my permission."

The detective flipped over the next page in the folder and handed Catherine a pen. "Could you please sign this consent form and we can get started on the investigation."

Catherine signed the document without really reading it.

"Thank you, we'll be in touch." Detective Bryce said as he picked up the file and ran out the door to his car. A moment later he was speeding out the driveway.

A few days later Paulette made an appointment to meet with Catherine at her office to go over her results of the walk through. All in all the house and grounds were worth over twenty five million with the hundred acres that it was sitting on with its own lake that connected through a canal to the Ocean.

"Well, just because it is worth twenty five million doesn't mean that's what I will get for it." Catherine replied with a laugh as she sat across from Paulette in her down town office.

"No, you may get more, you may get less. You just never know it will actually sell for." Paulette replied. "Since you want to sell quickly, I would like to suggest you list it for twenty two million and see what kind of offers you get."

"Sounds fair." replied Catherine as she took a sip of the coffee that Paulette's assistant had brought in. "I will count on you to handle all that for me. I need to get things packed up or sold and decide what to do next."

"Have you given any thought to where you want to live?! Paulette asked. "I can handle a purchase for you as well you know?" Paulette staid looking over her silver tipped reading glasses at Catherine.

"I was thinking that I would move to the cabin in Wyoming for now and let things calm down a bit before I begin to make any permanent plans." Catherine replied.

"Alright, we are ready on this end." Paulette told her. "I will let you know of any offers that come in. Just keep me posted as to where I can reach you."

Catherine sat her coffee cup down on the desk and picked up her purse that was at her feet. "Sounds good. In the meantime you can always reach me on my cell. Once I get to Wyoming it might be a different story though as there is no cell service out there. I will see about putting on a land line before I get out there. I will have to let you know."

"Take care of yourself Catherine." Paulette said giving her friend a small hug as she walked her to the outer office.

"Excuse me, Ms. Blacjart," said the young girl at the front desk. "Your three o'clock is here."

"Please see them in and get them something to drink. I will be right in." Paulette advised her young assistant.

"I will call you in a few days and check to see how you are doing, alright?" Paulette asked Catherine as she opened the front door for her to exit.

After a few days of attempting to pack up the house on her own she gave in and called a professional moving company to handle it all. They came in and boxed up the entire house and organized the boxes to what was going into storage and what was going to Wyoming. In a matter of two days the entire house was empty and either in storage or already on its way to the cabin.

Good thing to, Paulette had called her the following week and advised that there had been an offer on the property already, at her asking price. She just needed to meet her at the office and sign the papers.

Catherine had moved into a suite at the Plaza Hotel downtown, until she signed the papers and her flight out to Wyoming at the end of the week. She sat in the chair overlooking downtown the night before she was to meet Paulette. There was an open bottle of Chardonnay and Catherine

had poured herself a glass. She sat and looked out over the city through the large windows from the room on the tenth floor and thought about how in the course of less than a month, her life had taken such a drastic turn. Her head was spinning and not just from the wine.

Here she was, in her late thirties, starting her life all over again.