

## THE FLOOD

Carrie's eyes popped open at exactly 3:38 a.m. for no apparent reason other than the fact that her body was so used to rising early. Menopause had been a real treat the past few years. Rather than being annoyed, she appreciated how productive she could be at this hour when the house was quiet. She often joked to her husband, John, that she got more done by 8:00 a.m. than most people do in a day.

Out of habit, she turned on the news and saw that there had been unprecedented flooding in the low-lying areas of Thailand. After weathering a tsunami a number of years back, that area did not need another natural disaster, she thought. Her mind turned to another natural disaster in the region - an earthquake in Western Nepal a few months prior had decimated towns and taken the lives of thousands of people. She was used to these natural disasters simultaneously affecting far-flung regions of the world and her family. John was a trauma surgeon and often served in the field after these disasters. He had been in Nepal for two months already, with no end date in sight.

Carrie had been running in a million directions lately - Megan's college applications, Conner's football games and Taylor's middle school drama - and had not kept up with current events as much as she would have liked. With John overseas, Carrie was juggling it all, and, to be honest, not always well. After spending several hours catching up on emails, reading and planning a few community events, Carrie

shouted to Conner, “Hey, buddy, grab your backpack and meet me in the car.” “Ok, mom,” he hollered.

Conner was her middle child, a great student and star player on the Junior Varsity football team. Of her three children, he was the most like her and the least like her Type-A husband. She grabbed her keys, purse and coffee and headed to the driveway. Conner was chatty on the seven-minute ride to school. There is something about being in the car that allows children to open up. She would take what she could get. Megan was a senior and drove herself and Taylor took the shockingly-early middle school bus. A star student and athlete, Megan was stressed out with college applications and preparing for the SAT. Taylor, her younger daughter, was a newly-minted 7th grader, had a mind of her own, was a hormonal mess and liked to push Carrie’s buttons. Conner’s voice snapped her out of her thoughts.

“What should I do about HOCO? I like Madison, but I think she likes Ethan. I think Emma kind of likes me and wants me to ask her to go, but she is like a sister. I guess it would be okay to go as friends.” Emma’s mom, Courtney, and Carrie were close. Emma and her older brother, Parker, had grown up with Carrie’s children, so she was surprised to hear that Emma might be interested romantically in Conner. She made a mental note to ask Courtney about this the next time they had coffee. “Well, going with a friend would be fun,” said Carrie. “Yeah, maybe. I think Nate likes Madison, so maybe going with Emma as friends would be best,” said Conner. As the car inched its way to the front of the kiss-and-ride line, Carrie was glad for the few extra minutes with Conner. “Ok, bye, Mom. I’ll ride home with Megan.” Carrie shouted, “Love you, buddy,” but Conner already had slammed the car door.

Carrie's mind was a jumble as she slogged out of the high school parking lot thinking about her "to do" list. Spontaneously, she decided that coffee with Courtney would be a good diversion and texted her: "Coffee? Miranda's? Be there in five minutes." Courtney replied with a thumbs up. Miranda's was a local coffee place with an abundance of seating, great coffee and splurge-worthy baked goods. The two women caught up on a range of topics from the horrific fatalities in Thailand, John having been overseas for so long, Conner's HOCO date dilemma, Parker's recovery from mono, the ridiculously-high price of gas and when exactly "HOCO" had entered the lexicon instead of "Homecoming." Despite wanting to visit longer, they each had things to get done, so they said their goodbyes and went in separate directions.

As she walked to her car, Carrie was eager to talk to John the following night for their scheduled phone date. She was proud of him, of course, and knew that he would not be happy living his life full-time in the suburbs, but she wished he had a safer job closer to home. Carrie knew she was fortunate to have a husband and best friend who had a heart for helping people all over the world. He was a loving husband and devoted father to her children. As often happened when she was missing John, her thoughts turned to her mom, Sara, and what it must have been like to be widowed at age thirty-four. Carrie and her brother, Scott, were estranged somewhat from Sara and had been most of their lives. Their dad, Brian, had been a police officer who was killed in the line of duty forty years previously during a routine traffic stop gone wrong. At the time, Scott was eleven, Carrie was five and their younger sister, Susan, was a toddler. The childhood trauma from Brian's murder came flooding back to the forefront of her mind. Her dad's death was horrible and changed her life forever.

In the aftermath of Brian's murder, Sara went into a deep depression, barely got out of bed for weeks on end and had been incapable of raising the children. Luckily, Sara's mom, Helen, had moved in with them to help. Ever since, Carrie had resented Sara's absence. She never had been able to understand how Sara could abandon and ignore her own children. By the time Scott went off to college, when Carrie was twelve and Susan was nine, Sara re-engaged somewhat in their lives and tried to be a good parent, but the damage had been done.

Carrie had thought that after college, she and her mom might make amends, but then she moved to the East Coast after graduation, met and married John, went to law school and then supported John while he finished medical school. The kids came along after that and life got in the way. The years flew by and Carrie never reconciled with Sara. Maybe now was the time to forgive her mom and make amends? Now that she was a wife and parent herself, she had a little more empathy for her mom.

In the Miranda's parking lot, Carrie got a text from Scott. "Hey. Where is John these days? I just saw a news ticker that a small plane went down in a mountainous area of Northern Thailand en route to the flooded areas." Carrie replied that John was in Western Nepal and asked how her brother was. "Ok. Work is good. I am thinking of hiking in the Cascades next summer. Maybe you and the kids can fly out, especially if John is gone again." Carrie responded quickly, "Conner and Taylor would love that! Megan probably will stay home and work to save money for college." Scott went on to ask if Carrie had spoken to Sara, to which Carrie replied that she had not. "Neither have I," texted Scott. Carrie texted back, "I have to run. When I talk to John tomorrow night, I

will let you know if I learn anything about that plane crash.” “Give the kids a hug from their ole’ Uncle. Talk soon,” wrote Scott.

Scott was the eldest sibling, had never married and lived somewhat off the grid in the Pacific Northwest, but was solid and had worked for the same engineering company his entire career. Brian’s murder had accelerated his launch into adulthood and, to his credit, he had been responsible, diligent and reliable ever since. He remembered much more about that fateful night than Carrie did.

In contrast, their younger sister, Susan, was a drama queen, quick to overreact and often made snap decisions, some of which had been less than stellar. She was a wanderer, never staying in one place for too long nor holding a job, nor a man for that matter, for any length of time. Carrie was simultaneously frustrated with, and envious of, her sister’s seemingly carefree life. Susan remembered nothing about Brian’s murder. Truth be told, Carrie wished she remembered nothing, too.

The middle child, Carrie was the only one who had married. She had traded her law career for raising her children full-time and now was ensconced fully in suburban parenthood. She was extroverted, the peacemaker and well-liked by her siblings, friends and neighbors. Carrie and her two siblings were so different, but yet were similar in many regards - each of them was honest, kind, empathetic, resilient and full of grit. They all had wrestled with their demons from growing up without a dad. She often wondered how different all of their lives would have been if Brian had not been murdered.

Carrie ran a few errands and then settled in at home for the endless loads of laundry that she tackled daily. She liked to crank up 80s pop metal while she folded

clothes. Somehow rocking out to Def Leppard always seemed to make this chore palatable. Over the loud drumbeats of the music, Carrie thought she heard a knocking sound, but chalked it up to the road construction down the block. Belting out the lyrics to “Photograph” as she folded socks, she heard knocking again. Carrie decided to investigate, ran upstairs and opened the door to see two men in suits with United States Government identification badges. She instantly felt sick and knew something had happened to John.

“Ma’am, my name is Ben Rutter, with the U.S. Agency for International Development, and this is my partner, Mike Harrison. I regret to inform you that your husband was on a small plane that went down in a storm in mountainous terrain in Northern Thailand. We lost all radar contact and are actively searching for the wreckage with all resources available to us in the region. We are very sorry, ma’am.”

Carrie gasped, broke into a wail and collapsed into the chair on the porch. “No, no, no, this cannot be happening. John is in Nepal, not Thailand,” she choked out. Her whole life flashed before her and she was five years old all over again. Images flooded into her head of the two police officers on her porch who had delivered the awful news about her dad, her dad’s flag-draped casket at the memorial service and her mom dressed in black with tears streaming down her cheeks. Now, something had happened to her John. It was all too much and surreal. Mr. Rutter went on to say that John, three colleagues and two pilots were on a flight from Kathmandu to Bangkok to render aid to villagers in a flooded, low-lying area when the weather suddenly turned and presumably brought the plane down. Mr. Rutter continued, “We are sending a family services liaison, Robin Nelson, to be with you. We are treating this as a search and rescue

mission for now until we know more. In the meantime, is there a family member who can be with you?"

All Carrie could think of was her mom. She needed her mom here. There was no one else she wanted more than her mom. The resentment she had felt toward her mom melted away in an instant when she realized that she, too, was staring down widowhood. Carrie's emotions were so raw, but she knew that the resentment she had felt toward her mom all these years just had come to a screeching halt. With John presumably dead, or missing at best, Carrie knew that the person she needed most was her mom.

She picked up the phone and called her mom in California. "Hi, Mom. Something has happened to John. I need you here." Before Carrie could finish speaking, she heard her mom quietly sobbing. "I am on the next plane, honey."

### **EPILOGUE**

For four long and agonizing days, Sara and Carrie cried, laughed, hugged and made up for lost time. Sara shared how broken she had been after Brian's death. For the first time in her life, Carrie could relate to her mom. Both women experienced a flood of emotions as they waited for news about John. "I was so mad at you after Dad died. I needed you and you abandoned us," said Carrie. Sara responded, "I know, honey. I loved your dad so much. He was the love of my life and a part of me died with him. When he was killed, I lost the will to live. I am so sorry." Carrie felt for her mom and responded, "I understand it now, though. How am I going to survive this if John is dead?" Sara hugged Carrie tightly and said that they needed to remain hopeful. "Can you please forgive me for how horrible I have been to you all these years, Mom? I love

you,” sobbed Carrie. “Of course, honey. I am the one who needs your forgiveness. I realize now that I should have been stronger when your dad was killed. I regret that so much.” “I forgive you, Mom, and am so glad you are here,” sniffled Carrie.

The forty years that had passed since Brian’s murder were erased in a flash and they both felt lighter than they had in a long time, despite the gravity of the situation with John. The next day, the wreckage of John’s plane was discovered. John and the co-pilot were the only survivors and had subsisted on rain water and not much else. Miraculously, although both had sustained injuries and were dehydrated, both were expected to heal fully. John was to be transported to Tripler Army Medical Center in Honolulu to recover.

When Carrie was given the opportunity to fly to Oahu to be with John, she asked her mom if she would stay with the children for a few weeks until John was stable enough to fly home to Virginia. “Of course, honey. That’s what Nanny did for you kids and I would love nothing more than to do that for you.” On the flight to San Francisco, and then on to Honolulu, Carrie reflected on everything that had transpired the past few days. Her heart was full, a feeling she had not felt for most of her life. Although she would give anything for John not to have been injured, the reconciliation with her mom was the silver lining. The floodgates of forgiveness had been thrown open by floodwaters half a world away and, for that, Carrie was grateful and at peace.