

PROLOGUE

From the Diary of Wendy Kyle....

If you're reading this, I'm already dead.

How's that for an attention-grabbing opening line?

I know, I know...it's a bit melodramatic. And I'm not normally the melodramatic type. Really.

No, Wendy Kyle is the kind of woman who deals in facts for a living, the kind of woman who doesn't let emotion cloud her judgment and - maybe most importantly of all - the kind of woman who never blindly puts her trust in anyone.

Especially a man.

Hey, I'm not some man-hating bitch or anything like that, no matter what you may have heard or think about me. I like men. I love men, or at least I've loved a few men in my life. It's just that I don't trust them anymore.

So wouldn't it be ironic - or maybe a little bit fitting, to look at it completely objectively - if trusting a man this one time was what wound up costing me my own life in the end.

Here's the bottom line for me: If I don't succeed in what I'm about to do in the Ronald Bannister case, well...then it is important someone knows the truth about what happened to me.

And that it was the lies - all of the damn lies men have told - that were the death of me.

----- **The contents of this document were among evidence
seized by homicide detectives from the office of
Wendy Kyle Heartbreaker Investigations
218 West 42nd Street
New York City**

This entry is listed as: POLICE EXHIBIT A

Opening Credits

THE RULES, ACCORDING TO CLARE

Nora O'Donnell is 50 years old. Samantha Guthrie 51. Hoda Kotb 58, Robin Roberts 62 and Gayle King 68.

The point I'm trying to make here is that TV newscasters - specifically women TV newscasters - don't have to be cute, perky young talking heads to succeed in the media world where I work. We've come a long way since the days when a respected newswoman like Jane Pauley was replaced by the younger Deborah Norville on the Today show because some network executive (a middle-aged man, of course!) decided Pauley was getting too old to appeal to a television audience.

Or when an anchorwoman named Christine Craft lost her job at a station in Kansas City after a focus group determined she was "too old, too unattractive and not deferential to men." She was 37.

Well, 50 is the new 40 now.

Or maybe even the new 30.

And let's get something straight right up front here. I'm not one of those women who normally gets stressed out over every birthday that passes by or every wrinkle on my face or every gray hair or two I spot in the mirror. That is not me. No way. I'm not hung up about age at all.

But I am about to turn 50 this year.

The big 5-0.

The half-century mark.

And the truth is I'm having a bit of trouble dealing with that...

My name is Clare Carlson, and I'm the news director of Channel 10 News in New York City. I'm also an on-air reporter for our Channel 10 news show, and I've broken some pretty big exclusives in recent years that have gotten me a lot of attention and made me kind of a media star.

But this whole business of turning 50 still seems odd to me.

When I was in my 20s, I was a star reporter at a newspaper and won a Pulitzer Prize. In my 30s, after the newspaper went out of business, I switched to TV news at Channel 10. And in my 40s, I've been juggling two jobs: TV executive as the station's news director and also as an on-air personality breaking big stories.

Turning 30 and then 40 never really seemed like that big a deal for me. It was more fun than tragic. Look at me: I'm 40! But 50? I'm not so sure about that one. 50 is something completely different, at least the way I see it at the moment. I'm not sure where I go with my life after 50. It couldn't be happening at a worse time for me either.

Channel 10, the TV station where I work, is being sold to a new owner - and this has left everyone in our newsroom worried about what might happen next. My latest boss and I don't get along, and I'm afraid she might be looking for a reason to fire me. My personal life situation is even worse. I've been married three times (all of them ending in divorce), and right now I'm not in any kind of a relationship. I have a daughter, but she didn't even know I was her mother for the first 25 years or so of her life - so we don't exactly have a traditional mother/daughter relationship.

The only constant in my life - the one thing that I always turn to for comfort when my life is in turmoil - is the news.

This newsroom at Channel 10 where I work is my true home.

My sanctuary.

And so each day I wrap it - along with all the people in it and the stories we cover - around me like a security blanket to protect myself from everything else that is going on around me.

All I needed now was a big story to chase.

The bigger the better.

That's what I was looking for right now.

But as the old saying goes: Be careful what you wish for – because you just might get it.

And that's what happened to me with the Wendy Kyle murder...

Part I

THE HONEY TRAP

CHAPTER 1

Susan Endicott, the executive producer of Channel 10 News, walked into my office and sat down on a chair in front of my desk.

“What are you doing?” she asked.

“Talking to you.”

“I mean about tonight’s newscast.”

“Oh, that.”

“Don’t be impertinent with me, Carlson.”

What I was actually doing at the moment was putting together one of those old David Letterman style Top 10 lists. I like to do that sometimes. My topic today was: TOP 10 THINGS AN ASPIRING WOMAN TV NEWSCASTER SHOULD NOT SAY DURING A JOB INTERVIEW. My list went like this.

10. What’s that red light on the camera for?
9. Yes, Mr. Lauer, I’d love to be your intern.
8. I sweat a lot on air.
7. I can name all the Presidents back to Obama.
6. If it helps, I’m willing to get pregnant as a cheap on-air ratings ploy.
5. Katie Couric? Who’s Katie Couric?
4. No makeup, please. I want to let my real beauty shine through.
3. My IQ is almost in three numbers.
2. Can I watch TikTok video during commercial breaks?

And the Number One thing an aspiring woman TV newscaster should not say during a job interview....

1. I have a personal recommendation from Harvey Weinstein!

I wondered if I should ask Susan Endicott if she had any suggestions for my Top 10 list. Probably not. She might call me impertinent again.

“Do you have a lead story yet for the 6 p.m. show?” she asked now.

“Well, yes and no.”

“What does that mean?”

“The lead story is about a controller’s audit raising new questions about the viability of the city’s budget goals.”

“That’s not a lead story for us.”

“Hence, my yes and no reply to your question.”

“Do you have a plan for getting us a good story?”

“I do.”

“What is it?”

“Hope some big news happens before we go on the air at 6.”

“That’s your plan?”

“Uh, huh. The news gods will give us something before deadline. They always do.”

“The news gods?”

“You have to always believe in the news gods, Endicott.”

Looking out the window of my office, I could see people walking through the midtown streets of Manhattan below on a beautiful spring day. Many of them were coatless or in short sleeves. Spring was finally here in New York City after what seemed like an endless winter of snow and cold and bundling up every time you went out. But now it was spring. Yep, spring - time for hope and new beginnings. The sun shining brightly. Flowers blooming. Birds chirping. All that good stuff.

In a few weeks New Yorkers would start streaming out of the city on their way to Long Island or the Jersey Shore or maybe Cape Cod. I thought about how nice it would be to be in a place like that right now. Or maybe on a boat sailing up the New England coast. Anywhere but sitting here

at Channel 10 News with this woman. Except I knew that even if I did that, I'd probably wind up sooner or later sitting in another newsroom wherever I went talking about lead stories with some other person like Susan Endicott.

Endicott and I had been at war ever since she came to Channel 10. That was after the firing – or, if you prefer, the forced resignation – of Jack Faron, the previous executive producer who had first hired me as a TV journalist from my newspaper career and had been my boss for most of my time here.

Jack was a top-notch journalist, a good friend and a truly decent human being. Susan Endicott was none of those things. She was an ambitious career climber who had stepped over a lot of people in her efforts to score big ratings at the stations where she worked before. That's what had landed her the Channel 10 job here in New York, and she was determined to keep her star rising no matter what it took for her to do that. She had no friends that I was aware of, no hobbies or interests, no outside life of any kind. She was completely focused on the job and on her career advancement.

For whatever its worth, I didn't like the way she looked either. She wasn't fat or skinny, she wasn't pretty or unattractive, she was just...well, plain. Like she didn't care about her appearance. She wore drab clothes, hardly any jewelry, no makeup that I could see. It was like her appearance simply didn't matter to her.

Oh, and she wore her glasses pushed back on top of her head when she wasn't using them. I disliked people who did that. I know it sounds crazy, but that's the way I feel. It was the perfect final trait of Susan Endicott though. I detested everything about her. And, as you can see, she wasn't too fond of me either.

There were two things that had prevented her from getting rid of me so far.

I've broken some exclusive stories that got us big ratings. She did like the fact that I was an on-air media star, even if she didn't like me. So all I had to do was keep finding exclusives.

Also, the owner of Channel 10, media mogul Brendan Kaiser, had backed me in any showdown with Endicott since she arrived here. Always good having the big boss on your side when you're at odds with your immediate boss. But Kaiser was in the process of selling the station. We weren't sure yet who the new owner would be. Maybe it would be some great journalist or wonderful human being that would care about more than profits. But people like that don't generally buy big media properties like a TV station. So I was prepared for the worst once the new owner was in place.

That meant I needed to keep on breaking big stories.

And I hadn't done that in a while.

I needed to find a big story in a damn hurry.

"You better come up with a good lead before we go on the air at 6 tonight," Endicott said as she stood up and said over her shoulder as she started to leave my office.

"Or?" I asked.

"Or what?"

"That sort of sounds like you were giving me an ultimatum. As in 'or you're suspended. Or you're fired. Or your cafeteria privileges are suspended. Or you need to get a permission slip to go to the bathroom. Or...'"

Endicott turned around.

She glared at me.

Then she pushed her eyeglasses – which she'd been wearing – back on top of her head again.

A nice touch.

Perfect for the moment.

“Keep digging that hole for yourself, Carlson,” she said to me. “It will make it so much easier when the time comes to get rid of you.”

“You have a nice day too,” I said.

As things turned out, it didn't take very long to find a news lead for the show.

After Endicott left, Maggie Lang – the assignment editor and my top assistant – burst in to tell me we had a big murder that had just happened.

“Someone blew up a woman's car!” she said excitedly. “On a busy street in Times Square. The victim's name is Wendy Kyle, and she's a former New York City cop and a controversial private investigator who's been involved in a lot of high-profile divorce cases recently. Involving rich people, important people and catching them in sex scandals. Sounds like someone was out for revenge against her. Sex, money, power. This story has everything, Clare!”

Yep, the news gods had saved us again.