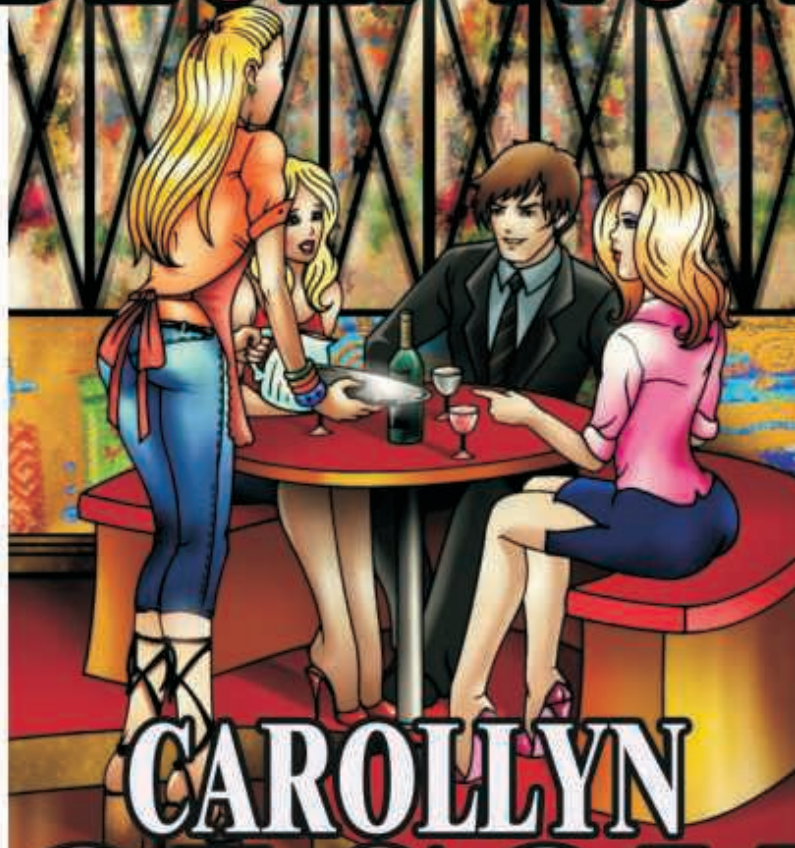


DECEPTION



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OLSON

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Deception

By Carollyn Olson

Step 1

Eric Allen was an unassuming junior press secretary in Washington, D.C., working for a powerful long term United States Senator.

Eric, in his mid-40s, was married to Sunny, his college sweetheart, and was the father of three children. They lived in a beautiful colonial style home outside Alexandria, Va., and his life was almost perfect. He coached his 12-year-old son's Little League team, watched his twin eight-year old girls in ballet and school activities, and enjoyed his time with his wife, whom he considered his best friend.

Eric had taken an unlikely route to Washington.

Growing up in Hibbing, the home of the world's biggest iron ore pit and rock icon Bob Dylan, Eric did what most young boys did during the cold Minnesota winter months. He played ice hockey. Eric learned to skate almost before he could walk and played his first game at age 5. He developed into an all-state high school right wing which, coupled with his straight A-average, resulted in scholarship offers from just about every major university that had a hockey program.

He chose the University of Minnesota not only for its hockey tradition, but an education in media and government. He flourished on the ice and in the classroom. When not scoring goals or handing out body checks, Eric loved to write. Despite his 5-foot-8, 160-pound frame, he was one of the last players cut from the United States team, coached by Herb Brooks, which won the 1980 Olympic gold medal at Lake Placid, NY. He knew, because of his size, he did not have a future in pro hockey, so he turned to his second love and a chance to use his education. He did not want to be a hockey bum, or go home and work in the ore mines.

Shortly after his last game, he received an invitation from an Eastern senator who loved hockey, among other things, to join his team. Eric could still play hockey on the amateur level and he would be right at the center of national politics. How could he resist the opportunity?

Washington was fascinating for Eric. There was always something to do in and around the Nation's capitol, but Eric enjoyed his regular 8 to 5 work hours and his time with his family. When home, he tried his best to put the politics of Washington out of his mind. Unlike his superior, Dean Walters, he was not on call 24/7. It was hard, but for 15 years he had succeeded in living "his" life. Yes, there were times during the political calendar, though, that his job could be demanding. It wasn't unusual for him to sleep in his office when the Senate was in late session, or retreat to an apartment that served as a second home to his boss, the man many called "The Senator."

The Senator had always been a commanding presence in Washington and around his staff. Although he had a soft heart, when an important bill was brewing or an election had to be won, the well-paid staff, including Eric, was expected to put in long, long, tedious hours for "The Cause." But there were rewards too.

One of the highlights for Eric and Sunny was the opportunity to join The Senator at the annual Washington Correspondents Dinner at the Hilton Hotel. Most of the year, Eric worked in the background for Walters, and only occasionally mingled with the many senators, congressmen or insiders. The April dinner was a reward for his work and gave him a chance to meet the Washington elite and to hear the President of the United States speak and jest with the usually detestable press, television and radio elite.

The dinner also presented Eric and Sunny a chance to "dress to the nines" and have a night on their own, not only at the dinner, but the all-night parties held in conjunction with the event.

The night of the dinner, the political winds continued to blow. The war in Iraq was the hot topic, slightly overshadowed by the nuclear problems with Iran and North Korea, the continuing apprehension that Cuba would fall with the death of Fidel Castro, and the upcoming Presidential candidates' debates. Eric's responsibility, as it was at the other parties, was to keep his eyes and ears open and to watch his boss and other politicians in action. He never would foresee what was going to happen.

Eric and Sunny arrived early at the insistence of The Senator, who also liked his staff to intermingle and learn what they could by talking to others and give him a complete report the next day. It was tedious mixing business with pleasure, but Eric took the assignment in stride. The best part of the evening was sitting next to Sunny at The Senator's table, just to the right of the Presidential podium.

The Senator was always known as a ladies man, and it seldom mattered whether he was married at the time or not. And after close to 30 years in the Senate, he enjoyed his adult beverages, along with his ever-present celebratory cigar. He was approaching his 70th birthday, loud and pompous, suave and graying. When he entered a room, he was the center of attention. In the eyes of most of the liberal-leaning press, The Senator was more powerful than the President. He could do no wrong.

As the dinner guests mingled and found their assigned tables, a loud roar from the late-arriving crowd caught Eric's attention. There he was, The Senator, making his grand entrance, barging through the main doorway, normally used by the Executive branch politicians. He was dressed in his black tuxedo with a bright red vest, and with a woman on each arm.

It was then Eric spotted Katie Hightower.

Unlike Lena, the silicone-busted, bleach blonde Marilyn Monroe want-to-be on The Senator's left arm, Katie was not an ordinary Washington "bimbo." She was different, as she held tight to his right arm as they worked their way through the crowd. She was dazzling with her reddish-blond hair softly touching her shoulders, just below the halter straps on her black, high collared, cutout back dress. A black peacock patterned shawl covered her shoulders, and her long legs could easily be seen up the right side of her dress. Both ladies dwarfed The Senator, but that was the norm, as he preferred tall women.

Eric let his mind wander, telling himself "The Senator really is a jerk," before his eyes worked their way back to Katie. He had never seen her before, and wondered where The Senator had found someone classy like her. She just had a different quality about herself, as if she didn't really belong with his boss, and Eric was immediately interested and determined to find out why he felt as he did.

The dinner bell rang and the attendees quickly moved to their seats. The meal had to begin on schedule as a C-SPAN television audience would be waiting for a 6 p.m. start. The President was to speak at 8 and all the awards and speakers must be finished first.

Eric and Sunny took their seats, but The Senator was still making the rounds with Katie and "Marilyn." Eric noticed only two empty seats at the table.

"I wonder which girl is his date." Eric asked Sunny.



"I hope it is the red head," she said. "I don't want to have to look at 'Marilyn' and her fake body all night. She's disgusting. I bet she isn't even wearing panties. Good thing there isn't a hot air vent around her to blow up her dress."

Eric, blushing at the thought, was in complete agreement.

Five, ten and 15 minutes had passed by and The Senator was nowhere in sight. Appetizers and expensive Washington state Cabernet and Merlot wine was presented to the guests and the traditional Caesar salad was on its way. With handshakes and gargantuan laughs, The Senator finally made his way to his table with Katie, much to Sunny's relief.

With the man-woman, man-woman seating arrangement, Eric was fortunate enough to sit next to Katie. She seemed lovely as she greeted each of the table guests, gave a big smile to Sunny and accepted a hand shake from Eric. "This is perfect," he thought.

As the preliminaries to the filet mignon dinner were consumed, Eric tried not to look too obvious in getting to know Katie. He wanted to be a gentleman, not forget his beautiful wife or to interfere with The Senator's jokes and kibitzing, and only speak with others when spoken too. Nobody was to upstage The Senator. It was a tough assignment, but he would survive.

Dinner was served and Katie asked Eric, in a soft, but medium pitched voice, "Would you pour me a glass of the merlot?"

Eric was so excited, he almost dropped the bottle, Katie blushed and Sunny broke out with a laugh, and whispered in his ear, "Haven't you ever poured a glass of wine for a woman before?" This was the opening Eric had waited for. He wanted to know all about Katie. "How did somebody like her end up with The Senator," Eric thought. "The Senator was not in her class."

Eric, Sunny and Katie exchanged pleasantries about family and politics during dinner, enjoyed the sometimes comical award presentations, and the short, subtle speech by The President, who did not joke with the audience as he had the year before in respect for the students at a major university who died in a senseless school shooting the week before.

When the event ended, Katie thanked Eric and Sunny for their company. It appeared she was distant with The Senator, who had already had too much to drink, and who cared more about the people at the other tables than his own lady friend. Even Katie did not know what happened to "Marilyn" except she was gone. The trio decided she must have been a "hired hand" for the grand entrance, got paid well, and went on to her next gig.

Katie, walked out of the ballroom with the Allens and without The Senator, flagged a taxi and was gone, for what Eric and Sunny hoped would not be forever. They both found Katie to be friendly, personable, beautiful and mysterious, but out of her element. As they drove home, they talked about the dinner and the subsequent after-hours party, but Eric could not get Katie out of his thoughts. They had been with Katie for four hours and he had not learned much about her. Something was not right and he wasn't sure what it was.

The loud ringing of the phone awoke Eric a little before 6 a.m. Saturday morning. The dinner had been over less than eight hours and The Senator was already making the rounds. He had not slept, was feeling the effects of too much to drink, and was calling his staff to get "the scoop from the troops." Eric had little useful information as the most sig-

nificant item he could relay to The Senator was the already-known rumor about an FBI investigation soon coming to an indictment of a prominent lawmaker. Most of his contacts talked little about politics and more about the upcoming baseball season. As far as Eric was concerned, it was a very uneventful night, except for Katie.

For The Senator, the indictment could be a slight problem.

Eric mustered the nerve to ask The Senator about Katie. He was told she was a friend of a friend and that he had never seen her until a couple of weeks before the dinner. The sister of a Washington area restaurant owner who had hosted a fund-raising dinner, Katie, as part of a silent auction at the fundraiser, had paid \$5,000 for a “date” with The Senator and a pass to the Correspondents dinner. He had no interest in seeing her again. The answer made Eric even more curious.

Step 2

After leaving the Allens at the Hilton curb, the cabbie drove Katie to the bungalow she shared with her boyfriend, Mark. She slipped out of her gown, removed her makeup, fluffed out her hair and fell into her soft shorty pajamas to get some much needed sleep.

“The Senator was too much for anyone in their right mind to handle,” she thought to herself as she tried unsuccessfully to drift off to sleep. She could not get one thought out of her mind. The Senator had let something slip which she didn’t like and she was intrigued by the prospects. She got out of bed and made two late night phone calls to her friends Cynthia Decker and DeeDee Gauthier.

The weekend passed with calm as the Allens attended church and Bible class with their children, and rested at home. Katie continued to be a topic of conversation, verbally for Sunny and mentally for Eric. Sunny felt she and Katie had created a bond and hoped she would see her again. Eric wanted to find her.

Sunny had always had an inquisitive nature. Originally named Sunflower by her free-spirited never-married New York Greenwich Village beatnik parents, she had always looked out for herself. As a child, she was continually chided about her name and she hated it. When she turned 18, she legally changed her name and revolted against her liberal parents by registering as a Republican. She and her parents had been estranged ever since.

Always a good student, Sunny fled to Minnesota and after working odd jobs to earn money for college, she enrolled in the University of Minnesota, and fell head-over-heels for Eric. They had met when Eric, a junior at the time, accidentally collided with Sunny while rollerblading across campus with members of the hockey team. Sunny liked to think the collision was intentional, since she and Eric were enrolled in two classes together, but had never spoken. Sunny’s perky personality and matching bubbly appearance swept Eric off his skates. It was love at the first body check. They were married the day after Eric’s graduation one year later.

Step 3

With the Senate session quickly heading to the summer recess and The Senator's calendar filled with legislation, fund-raising, dinner, parties, and vacation plans, Eric plunged back into his job. He had press releases to write, advance schedules to make and many odd jobs to do, plus get his Little League team ready for their biggest game of the year – a battle for first place.

Sunny began to search for Katie. Most of the people she knew in Washington were somehow connected to government, and she hoped they could get together for some non-political girl talk. Being at home with the children was always time consuming, and seldom did Sunny have an opportunity to get out with friends. She hoped she and Katie could become friends.

Weeks passed without any signs of Katie. Eric's son won the big game with a sixth inning game winning double; all three children finished the school year with straight A grades; the family took a well deserved vacation to Yellowstone National Park, and The Senator was not the lawmaker who was indicted by the FBI, at least for the time being.

Katie had other ideas. With her friends Cynthia and DeeDee, they began looking into what she had learned about The Senator. Cynthia, a flaming redhead, owned a private investigating firm, contracted with the FBI and other government regulatory agencies. With help of a few of her contacts, Cynthia discovered many things were coming to a head in Washington.

And one of the heads might be The Senator's.

Cynthia's associates had determined that while The Senator was not the main character in an international banking/campaign finance fraud and money laundering conspiracy, he was a supporting member. The big man in the operation was a close Senatorial colleague and had been indicted during the summer months, refused to resign his position, and was awaiting trial. Washington was awash with rumors of who would be named next, even though Senator Marcus Keith had been closed-lipped and his shrewd and powerful attorney, Nicholas Black, was citing the 5th Amendment and complete innocence.

The Senator continued to be his boisterous self and didn't seem fazed his name would pop up occasionally regarding his relationship with Keith in the Washington Post and New York Times.

Meanwhile, Katie and her girls were getting the word out through their network of friends. Katie's circle of friends was amazing. They were professionals and knew how to get things done without arousing suspicion. As a group, they had participated in more than a dozen cases of national significance, including helping the FBI to the recent arrests of a large United States based terrorist group. And, they were all crossdressers... that is, men who dress as women.

Katie herself was not a cross dresser, but a genetic female. Many people considered men who tried to impersonate women as unbalanced, weird, gay, or just sickos. Katie did not.

Through her work at the Office of Homeland Security, she developed a network of friends she could always trust, who with a quick change of clothing, could pose as either a

man or a woman and without a shadow of doubt, which allowed them to blend into any situation when necessary.

The VC group was loyal to the cause. They were a collection of straight professionals, including Gulf War and Viet Nam vets, doctors, architects, TV correspondents and athletes, who had the desire to serve their country in any way they could. For this group of CDs, espionage was a passion and in most cases, their spouse or significant other approves.

Katie's first experience with cross-dressers was after she caught her long-time boyfriend and lover wearing her clothes. At first she was shocked, but then after a series of long talks with Mark, she discovered she could use him and his desires...as well as his friends in the Vanity Club internet group.

Mark was vivacious when dressed as April Ashley. Tall and thin, he had the perfect build to be a macho man during the day and a curvy, soft and beautifully feminine woman at night. And, he and Katie wore the same dress size. Often Katie and April went out on the town as best friends and nobody knew the difference. April's long legs, padded hips and chest and medium length rooted-blond hair complemented Katie and many people thought of them as sisters. Mark had the unique ability to create a convincing illusion.

Mark had been a member of the prestigious 200 member online sorority for five years.

With Mark's assistance and the club membership, Katie became friends with a number of the girls, many whom had similar interests, other than dressing. What Katie liked the best about the Vanity Club was the closeness and support of the members and the "tight-lipped" girls she learned she could trust with top-secret concerns.

At a top secret OHS meeting a few years earlier, Katie had proposed a secret undercover group to investigate political crimes. She presented her idea, with Mark's assistance, to the Homeland directors, and after lengthy discussions, organization and governmental approval, the VC girls were born.

Each member of the new investigator group was required to come to Washington for an in depth interview, background check, pictures in male and female garb, credentials, and legal instructions, or basically what they could and could not do. When Katie sent out the word for applicants she expected only a few responses. She was overwhelmed with close to 50 candidates. Only the most qualified were chosen for the code name Born Again operation. With very little federal money available to start Born Again, the Homeland board set up an incentive laden contract with Katie and secured a number of backdoor sponsorships through individual and corporate grants. With approval and a limited budget the secret group slowly was organized.

Step 4

Time passed as the VC girls worked to compile compelling information on the Senatorial investigation. Trust was most important and they needed one more "In" among the Washington astute before they could even come close to breaking the case open.

Eric was working alone in his office late one evening trying to tie up loose ends. He would spend the night at The Senator's apartment since he had to be at a fund-raising

breakfast the following morning. He had finished saying good night and "I love you" to Sunny and the children when his computer flashed "You've Got Mail."

The e-mail came in on his special/private account, known only to Sunny and a few family friends. The Senator did not even have this address. Eric figured it was spam.

Eric opened the account and found an unfamiliar account name: maquiadcgrl.

That convinced him it was spam, and Eric started to delete the mail without opening. Then he had second thoughts. "Maybe it is important?" he told himself. "Maybe it is from The Senator? I'd better check."

With a click, Eric was no longer perplexed. It was a message from Katie! "How did she get my e-mail, why is she writing me, and what does she want?" Eric thought. But deep down inside he was thrilled to hear from her.

With his heart pumping at an irrational rate, Eric read Katie's short message. She wanted to meet with Eric and Sunny as soon as possible. She asked Eric not to respond via the internet, but to call her from a phone booth and use a special number.

Eric scampered out of the office and headed to the apartment. However, he stopped for a late dinner at the local McDonald's and found a pay phone, outside a corner gas station to make "the call" which would change his life.

Eric dialed the number nervously. His hands were shaking and his stomach was churning after shoveling down his Big Mac dinner and fries. He was having problems breathing...almost hyperventilating.

Katie answered on the first ring. She was so excited to receive Eric's call, she could hardly restrain herself. Eric calmed when he heard her voice and felt more relaxed with a vision of her beauty stuck in his memory.

"Eric, I need to talk with you and Sunny," said a calmed Katie. "I can't tell you why right now, but we must get together. Will you meet me?"

Since it was after midnight, Eric said he would try to reach Sunny early the next morning before the scheduled breakfast. Katie's plan was to meet the following evening at her brother's restaurant. Katie said she would be wearing a black skirt suit and pink blouse. Eric hardly listened as his mind wandered. How would he ever forget her face?

Eric was told to leave a message for Katie, after confirming Sunny was also available, on another of her many special phone numbers. Getting Sunny to agree might be a problem, not because of Katie, but the need for somebody to watch the children on late notice.

Eric told Katie the only problem with meeting the next evening would be securing some one to watch the children on short notice, especially since it was a school night. And he wasn't sure if Sunny would allow a stranger into their home.

"Don't worry about that," Katie said. "I'll get my sister Rene to stay with your children. She is a pre-school teacher and she's great with kids. I'll tell her to be at your place about 7. That way you and Sunny can have a little time with her before heading back to D.C. We can meet at 9?"

The fact that Katie was even providing a babysitter drove home to Eric the point of how urgent this meeting must be.

Eric had trouble sleeping all night at The Senator's roomy apartment. With his mind was racing at 100 miles per hour, and his thoughts of the meeting with Katie became more intriguing by the minute. "What is so important," Eric told himself. In the morning, Sunny said the same thing.

Eric phoned Sunny as soon as he awoke from his so-called sleep. She was stunned to learn of Katie's contact with her husband, not in any suspicious way, but because she had been trying to find her elusive "friend" as well. Sunny quickly agreed to the meeting and the offer of a babysitter, but Eric warned her "we might be getting into something" we may not want to be associated with. Eric, however, had another funny feeling.

The work day didn't go fast enough for Eric. It was a fairly typical day of press releases and phone calls. Laura Carillo, a new reporter from the Washington Post, dropped in to ask about copies of The Senator's recent speeches on health care. On any other day, Eric would have taken time to try to develop a professional relationship with the reporter – though Eric was loyal to his wife, he would have been blind not to notice Laura was wearing a scoop neck yellow blouse, a short brown skirt and pumps – but his mind was totally absorbed with the meeting with Katie and had little interest in the lovely girl across his desk.

Eric was out the door at 5 and home in Alexandria in time to change and talk with Sunny a few minutes before the doorbell rang and Katie's sister Rene was waiting on the porch dressed in a red tank top, faded hip-hugger jeans, and flat sandals, with her long brown hair tied in a pony tail. She resembled Katie in many ways and was just as attractive.

"Hi, I'm Rene Fredericks," she said, extending her hand. "You must be Eric Allen."

"Won't you come in," Eric said. "My wife, Sunny, is up stairs still getting ready. Let's find the kids." "Thanks," Rene said. "Katie tells me you three have some important 'can't wait' meeting. That woman is the hardest worker I know. Once she gets started on something, there's no stopping her."

Sunny came downstairs and met Rene. The two hit it off quickly, just as Sunny had with her sister Katie. Sunny gave Rene a quick rundown on bedtimes and late snacks and their cell phone number and they headed out the door.

"Don't worry about how long you're out," Rene said. "I don't have to be at pre-school until 9 tomorrow and I only live a short distance away. I even have a change of clothes in the car. I'll probably be sacked out on the couch by the time you get home anyway."

The Allens reached the appointed restaurant early and they were greeted by Katie's brother, Scott, who led them to a table at the back of the dining room. There, sat Katie

glowing with her radiant smile and style. They were so happy to meet again and Katie and Sunny chatted as if they had been long-lost sisters. Eric looked at the menu and listened as the ladies talked and waited for his chance to say something. It would have to come later.

"We looked everywhere for you," said Sunny. "We wanted to talk with you too, but all our efforts were obviously unsuccessful."