

## CHAPTER 1



1898 SCRANTON, PENNSYLVANIA

“I can’t print this,” Filmore Pugh said, tossing the handwritten page on Sarah’s desk. He was the managing editor for the Scranton Observer newspaper.

“What’s wrong with it?” Sarah demanded.

“This piece is inflammatory. Tone it down. There is no reason to graphically detail what was done to that woman.”

“I wrote the truth,” Sarah said bluntly. “Mary Cantor was brutalized and murdered. Her only crime was protesting when a mob of men lynched her husband illegally! All you want to report is that the men were out of control! Every one of them should have to endure the same vigilante sentence and punishment!”

“All our readers need to know was a woman was killed by a lynch mob that got out of control. You can write it with a sympathetic tone. We don’t need to alienate our subscribers,” Filmore said as if he were admonishing a child.

“This is supposed to be a newspaper. We are supposed to print the truth!”

“Not when our readers might take offense. This is Scranton, not New York City,” Filmore said firmly. He picked up her piece and inked out line after line of the facts, scrawled his signature of approval for printing, and dropped it back into her inbox. “If the press room runner doesn’t come by, make sure this piece gets to the typesetting department. I’ll see you later this evening.” He moved closer, but Sarah quickly stepped behind her desk, so he couldn’t touch her.

He gave her a condescending smirk. “It’s not the end of the world, Sarah. You are not cut out to be a writer. After we’re married, I’ll find something more suitable, maybe you can write an occasional feature in the women’s section. I’ll see you later.”

Filmore left her office, and when she was sure he was gone, Sarah closed the door and turned the lock. He took an unlocked door as permission to enter and paw at her. He took every opportunity to harass and embarrass her.

Her news articles being rewritten had become routine. Howard Davenport, her stepfather, had turned over most of the Scranton Observer newspaper’s responsibility to Filmore. She folded her story and put it in her purse. She removed the sleeve protectors, pinned on her straw hat with silk daisies decorating the brim, and walked out of the office. The Observer would be missing sixteen inches of copy, and once again, the truth would not be told. Her by-line would also be missing, but that too had become routine. Filmore Pugh couldn’t get past his male ego to realize that women could be competent writers.

Sarah left the office, walked a couple of blocks to catch the streetcar to go home. Entering what most people called the Cameron mansion, she went straight to her room. Flora, her stepmother, wouldn’t be awake for hours. Locking the bedroom door, she pushed a panel that led to passageways that had been built so servants could perform their duties without being seen. The hidden halls and stairs had been there since the house was built nearly a century before.

Lighting a paraffin lamp, she made her way to the attic. The estate had been converted from gas to electricity a decade earlier during the electrification of Scranton. The secret passageways had not been wired because they hadn't been discovered. The passages had been forgotten as ownership had passed down through the generations. She had found them as a silent and curious child trying to hide from her stepparents.

Sarah made herself comfortable, and she sat before her prized possession—her Munson No. 2 Typewriter. Closing her eyes, she tried to calm herself after dealing with Filmore Pugh. Then rolling a piece of paper into her typewriter, she typed a carefully prepared and false letter that would send anyone searching for her on a false trail. She removed the finished page from her typewriter, slid it into her desk drawer, and turned the drawer key. She couldn't take a chance of anyone finding it.

Several hours later, there was a light knock on her bedroom door. She heard the knock again and her stepmother's voice. Going to the door, she opened it. "What do you need, Flora?"

"It's almost time for dinner, darling," Flora Davenport said. "Goodness, you're not even dressed."

"I was lying down. I'm not coming down for dinner," Sarah said. "I'm not feeling well."

Flora looked distressed. "Oh, your father won't like that, dear. He's invited company."

"That horrible Filmore, no doubt," Sarah said.

"Don't be like that, darling," Flora whined. "Howard has tried so hard to be a good father. I hope you feel better. I'll have a tray sent up later."

When the door was closed, Sarah quickly double-checked the panel to the passage was secured in place. She slid a half-packed suitcase under the bed and out of sight. She knew who to expect next.

Ten minutes later, there was an impatient knock on her door.

Howard Davenport didn't wait for her permission before entering her room.

"What's this nonsense about you not coming down for dinner?" her stepfather demanded.

"I don't feel up to it." Sarah started to make her excuse, but she was interrupted.

"I invited Filmore to join us, and I expect you to be in your place. He is our guest!"

"He's your guest," Sarah said.

Howard crossed into Sarah's bedroom, gripped her arms painfully, and raked angry eyes over her. "You will dress and come downstairs. You seem to have forgotten your position in this household. I expect you to be gracious and polite to Filmore."

Sarah tried turning away from her stepfather. "I'm afraid I don't think as highly of Mr. Pugh as you do."

"Filmore is a fine man," Howard declared. "He will make you a good husband, and we have come to an understanding."

"I don't even like him!" Sarah said.

"Nonsense!" Howard said, dismissing her words. "He will make you an excellent husband."

"You're not listening," Sarah exclaimed.

"No, you are not listening," Howard snapped. "I've put a roof over your head, and I've given you a proper education. It's time for you to do your duty to this family."

"The roof over my head belongs to my grandmother, not you," Sarah denied. "You can't dictate who I will marry!" The pressure on her arms increased, and Howard Davenport's face darkened with fury. He would leave bruises, and it wasn't the first time.

"Get dressed!" Howard ordered furiously. "You will come down and behave in a manner befitting a Davenport. You will not embarrass me! Have I made myself clear?"

Sarah nodded, and Howard Davenport couldn't have cared less about the hatred he saw in her eyes. She was a woman, and she would do as she was told.

“Good,” Howard snapped. “Put on the blue dress Flora ordered for you from that New York catalog. I have a feeling before this evening is over, there will be something to celebrate.”

Sarah rubbed her arms because she knew there would be bruises and glared at the closed door.

“Over my dead body!” she whispered.



SARAH WATCHED her *so-called* parents leave the house from her bedroom window. They were going to church as they did every Sunday morning. They put on a holier-than-thou front of moral superiority, but she knew the truth. She had three hours to make her escape, nine hours before they would realize she was gone.

She picked up a large suitcase and carried it down the back stairs.

“Hurry,” Millie O’Neil, the cook, and housekeeper exclaimed as Sarah raced into the kitchen.

Sarah set the suitcase on the floor and rushed back to her room to fetch another. Entering her bedroom, she carried down two more cases. One was her typewriter, and another contained a portrait of her parents carefully wrapped. She set them down in the kitchen, and Millie took them outside. Sarah rushed through the house, making sure Millie hadn’t seen where she’d gone, and disappeared behind a hidden door in the music room.

She entered Howard Davenport’s locked office through a hidden passageway and emptied her stepfather’s desk of files, stuffing them into two empty valises. She sneered at his stupidity. He kept the safe locked at all times but kept the safe combination written on a piece of paper inside his desk drawer. The key to his desk was hung on a wall hook.

Sarah opened the safe and emptied the cashbox. She had hoped to find her mother’s jewelry box, but it wasn’t there. Instead, she took the paperwork locked in the safe. If Howard Davenport was

hiding something behind locks, it was because he didn't want his dirty deals known. She would sort through the papers later.

If her stepfather followed his usual pattern, he would return from church, stuff himself with a midday meal, and drink himself into a stupor. Howard Davenport was a Sunday drunk, controlling his thirsts during the week but imbibing on his only day off. If his habits held true, he wouldn't enter his home office until he returned from the newspaper office late Monday night.

Millie took a valise from her and handed it to her youngest son, Tom, who was driving the carriage. Tom was home during a spring break at the school he attended. Millie locked the kitchen door and joined Sarah in the carriage. The carriage finally pulled behind a warehouse several miles away, where an enclosed wagon was waiting. Tom and the driver switched the luggage to the other wagon.

"Are you sure you want to do this?" Millie asked, throwing her arms around Sarah in a tight hug.

"Absolutely," Sarah said. "If I don't, I'm going to be forced into a marriage with a man I despise. Thank you for your help. I would never have had the courage."

"You planned this. I only helped," Millie said. "Be safe, take care, and write to me in care of Matthew."

Sarah handed Millie the letter. "I'll write. Please place this note on Flora's dressing table. Hide it under a doily or something, so she won't see it right away. I've already told her I am visiting a friend named Daphne today. Even if she remembers the name, there is no Daphne. They won't expect me back until seven this evening. That gives me plenty of time to disappear."

"God bless, you child. 'Tis a shame when a child has to run from her parents."

"That's just it, Millie. They aren't my parents. You've been more of a parent to me than they have since my mother died. You were my nurse as a baby, my governess, and now my confidant. Hurry and get to the church, so you'll be sitting in a front pew beside Matthew, as you always are when Howard and Flora arrive

for the second service. I don't want them to accuse you of anything."

"Not to worry, my darling," Millie said with another hug. "I've not told a soul, but me sons. I'll drop Tom off at the train station and take the carriage back. He will be on the next train going back to school, and no one would dare accuse or question my Matthew. He's a priest. He won't lie, but Matthew will not tell our secrets either. Go now and be safe, my child!"

"Be careful," Sarah exclaimed, hugging her friend. "If Harold even suspects you helped me, you will be without a job."

"He'll be hard placed to replace me with his reputation of how he treats his staff," Millie said. "Now, you had best be going. You have my Matthew's address, and if I get fired, I'll be living with him and Father Joseph at the parish house, taking care of them. Write to him, and he will pass the letters to me."

"I won't forget, although you might not hear from me right away," Sarah promised, pulling a widow's veil over her face. She was not leaving her home destitute, and she wasn't going far. Her escape had been well planned. Sarah was taking the necessary steps toward freedom. As they feared, Davenport had somehow discovered that Sarah's inheritance would come into play on her twentieth birthday. That's why he'd become so desperate for her to marry a man under his control.

No one knew of her plans, not even Millie. Sarah had six months to take down her stepfather.

Her luggage was unloaded onto the Suwanee train station platform, and the driver tipped his hat. The young man didn't know who he was transporting and wouldn't recognize her because of her widow's veil. He had been paid well to take her to an out-of-town train station. The young man was under the impression she was purchasing passage on the next train because she was leaving a drunkard husband.

Ten minutes later, a carriage stopped at the station. An older gentleman jumped from the seat and introduced himself as Mr.

Henry Cloney. Sarah remembered him, and he loaded the luggage into the carriage. They were out of sight in only a few minutes. Sarah hoped everyone would believe she had run away. She prayed she wouldn't be found in Suwanee, only fifteen miles from Scranton, Pennsylvania.



NICK ADAMS STOOD at the window of his second-floor corner office and watched as a carriage stopped on the street below. The driver, an older man, helped a woman to the sidewalk. He'd met this woman before, but he wasn't interested in Mrs. Ardella Cameron. She was a dowager of wealth in Scranton's upper class. Nick wondered if she even knew how corrupt her son-in-law Howard Davenport was in his business dealings.

Mrs. Cameron had the previous week personally delivered an unfinished manuscript to him. He had promised to have one of his staff read it purely out of courtesy. Nick hadn't expected his senior editor, Cornelius Higgins, to rush into his office the very next morning. Usually, a very rigid and dignified man, Cornelius had demanded to know who had written the book. He had declared it was the most exciting piece of fiction he'd read in a very long time, even if it wasn't finished!

Nick had begun reading the manuscript that very afternoon. He hadn't been able to set it aside himself until it abruptly stopped. He'd been disappointed that there wasn't more, but Nick knew why. He was surprised that Cornelius hadn't recognized the storyline. Then he realized that Cornelius rarely concerned himself with anything beyond the scope of his job as an editor. It was his profession and his life. He had no interest beyond the words on printed pages.

The novel wasn't fiction but based loosely on facts that Nick had spent the better part of the night digging out of his father's old newspaper files. Nick had been fourteen at the time of the scandal.



He'd spent his summer vacation from boarding school running errands at his father's newspaper. So much had happened while he'd been gone. He had returned to an unknown future and his father on his deathbed.

After reading the manuscript, Nick had immediately contacted Mrs. Cameron and scheduled a meeting. He watched from the window and was surprised when a small figure jumped from the carriage to the sidewalk. The petite woman was shrouded in mourning black. He waited for a man to exit the carriage, but the driver closed the door and tipped his hat.

*A woman?* What was Mrs. Cameron trying to pull? Nick backed away from the window and took his position behind his large, imposing desk. He'd always found it helped if he was in a position of power when dealing with would-be authors. He waited until his secretary John knocked on his office door.

"Mrs. Ardella Cameron and company, sir," John said.

"Come in," Nick said, getting to his feet and inviting the two women inside. "Do you mind if I close the door?"

"We would prefer to meet with you in private," the small woman behind the veil said.

Nick motioned the women to the two chairs opposite his desk.

"Are you surprised?" Mrs. Ardella Cameron asked as her companion lifted her veil.

Nick was facing a beautiful, young woman, with the innocent face of an angel, the like of which he'd printed in a recent book. Uncovered the younger girl's hair was pale blonde, and her eyes were a deep sapphire blue. He'd not seen her in person for a decade.

He cleared his throat and turned his attention to the older woman

"I am. I expected the author of the book you brought me to review," Nick said. "The author's name is Douglas Emerson. Are you writing under that name?"

"No, I write under that name," the younger woman said.

"Miss Cameron," Nick said, surprised. "The Observer printed last week that you had been kidnapped."

"Sarah, please," Sarah said. "I'm afraid it's one of many false stories printed in the Observer."

"According to the newspapers and the police, you've been missing for several weeks," Nick said.

"Not true," Sarah said. "My stepfather was informed that I was with my grandmother. Granted, he doesn't know where my grandmother and I are living, but he was informed that I was with her and safe. He and Filmore Pugh have perpetrated quite a scandal on my behalf, claiming I was kidnapped."

"You might have noticed that the police are no longer investigating the case," Mrs. Cameron exclaimed. "My attorney took care of that matter."

"I don't read the Observer," Nick said bluntly. "I wouldn't dignify the paper by paying two cents for it, but I can't help seeing the headlines when it's on the newsstands or the desks of my employees."

"We didn't want my stepfather to put a wanted bounty on me," the younger woman said. "Preferable found dead!"

"You jest," Nick said.

"Unfortunately, we do not," Mrs. Cameron said.

"May I ask why you ran away?" Nick asked.

"Because my stepfather thought he was going to force me into a marriage with Filmore Pugh," Sarah said. "It was not acceptable to me, but my stepfather and Pugh were making plans and ignoring my refusals. My mother's will states that I come into my inheritance on my twentieth birthday. At that time, I will no longer require a guardian, and I can claim what is legally mine. I will become the owner and controller of the Cameron estate. I will also own sixty-five percent of the Observer."

"We are about to turn the tables on my son-in-law and his co-conspirator," Mrs. Cameron said stoutly. "Howard Davenport is going to be deposed of his misappropriated position as Publisher

and Editor in Chief of the Scranton Observer. He does not have a right to either title."

"I'm intrigued, but do I want to know or become involved in this matter?" Nick asked.

Mrs. Ardella Cameron looked to her granddaughter. The life-lines on the elderly woman's face deepened with concern and fear. "I sincerely hope you do, Mr. Adams. Sarah's life may depend on it."



NICK ADAMS STOOD STARING out his window and watched until the carriage drove out of sight. He returned to his desk, picked up the manuscript, and then turned it over. The novel hadn't been discussed other than discovering that it was written by Sarah Cameron. It was remarkably well written for someone so young. Sarah Cameron was nineteen, seemingly anxious to age into her twentieth year for the freedom it would allow her. She would have difficulty commanding respect as she looked to be still in her younger teen years.

There was a knock on his office door, and Nick knew it would be his senior editor.

"Come in!"

"I'm sorry, I'm late, but I couldn't get away from Professor Pinkel," Cornelius exclaimed, looking flustered. "He's written one book, having it printed at his expense, and he thinks he knows everything about publishing. Did you have the meeting with Douglas Emerson?"

"No," Nick said. "I had to cancel the meeting. I think we'll be publishing the book but not any time soon. Some legalities need to be addressed. I have been informed this author has four completed books, a series using the same characters."

"When can we get our hands on them?" Cornelius demanded eagerly.

"Soon," Nick said. "The author is a bit of an odd duck, so I'll be

dealing with him myself.”

“Worse than Professor Pinkel?” Cornelius asked. “I was looking forward to taking on a new client. One with actual talent.”

“Sorry,” Nick said with a grin. “You’ll get your wish, just not with the unfinished book you read. As soon as I get my hands on the first of the series, you can start editing it,” Nick promised, making up his mind. He got to his feet. “Cornelius, I’m going to be busy, and possibly out of touch at times, for the next several weeks, maybe longer. I have personal business to address. I’m going to need to rely on you heavily to take care of business here at Keystone Publishing.”

“Of course, sir,” Cornelius Higgins said. “I hope everyone in your family is well.”

“I only have Max, and he is fine. I’ll be in and out of the office for a while. The Emerson manuscript we read will be set aside, and it’s not to be discussed with anyone other than myself. The four-book series we will work on together to establish if they are good enough to publish.”

“Of course, sir,” Cornelius promised.

Nick smiled fondly at the older man. “I’ve been after you for years, not to *sir* me. You’re my right arm, and I depend on your wisdom and discretion. I’ll tell John he needs to report to you when I’m not here.”

“Thank you, *sir*,” Cornelius said, and he grinned. “Old habits are hard to break, and I’m older than most. I’ll take care of everything as best I can.”

“I have full faith in you, and I’ll be checking in regularly,” Nick said, pulling on his overcoat. He walked out of the building, but he looked back to face the brick facade. There were faded fragments of the Scranton Herald News banner still adhering to the brick. The newspaper had been his father’s life’s work. It had gone bankrupt and was destroyed by Howard Davenport. Nick had the proof in his briefcase.

He had been asked to help two women assert themselves and

take back what belonged to them. He was also being offered a chance to destroy his father's enemy. Nick wasn't sure that was the route he wanted to take, but the Cameron women needed his help. They wouldn't be able to overthrow Davenport by themselves.

Needing to clear his head, Nick decided to walk to his brother's law office. He pulled his coat collar tighter around his neck and settled his hat on his head. Although it was late April, spring was taking its sweet time this year, and the temperatures were still in the low forties. A young woman passing him on the sidewalk dropped a package. He picked it up and handed it to her.

"Thank you," she said, beaming an interested smile at him.

Nick nodded, smiled, and tipped his hat. Any other time he might be interested in striking up a conversation, but right now, his mind was on an angelic face of a young girl who had been horribly wronged.



SARAH WAS TYPING a page from her latest handwritten manuscript when her grandmother knocked on the office door.

"Yes, Gran?"

"We have an unexpected visitor. No, child, don't panic!" Ardella said. "Mr. Nick Adams and his brother are here to speak to us."

"His brother?" Sarah questioned. "We asked him to keep his counsel."

"We need to hear what he has to say before we doubt his integrity," Ardella suggested.

"I'm a mess," Sarah exclaimed, looking down at her aproned dress and sleeve covers.

Ardella smiled. "I imagine Mr. Adams and his brother have seen worse. They grew up in the newspaper business."

"Still," Sarah exclaimed, removing her clothing protectors. She swept her hand over her hair to make sure it wasn't unruly.

"I apologize for the intrusion," Nick said when the women

entered the room.

"We asked for your cooperation and confidentiality, Mr. Adams," Sarah said.

"Yes, you did," Nick said. "This is my brother, Maxwell Adams. Max is an attorney, and considering the kind of coup d'état you are attempting, I think you need all the legal advice you can get."

"We're not trying to overthrow a government, Mr. Adams," Mrs. Cameron exclaimed. "I want to remove that man from a position of authority in a company he doesn't own."

"A company he has run and controlled for the last fifteen years," Max Adams said. "Technically, and legally the law is on your side. Actually, rousting him from the position is more difficult. The publication of your granddaughter's book, which I spent the better part of last night reading, is begging for a legal case of libel. Even if it's labeled as fiction."

"Why does it have to be labeled fiction? It's the truth," Sarah demanded.

"Because Howard Davenport has never been charged with any crime involving your mother," Max said. "There is no proof that he murdered her."

"The police wouldn't listen to me," Sarah exclaimed. "I've explained that! Howard Davenport has the police in his pocket."

"That may be true," Max said. "But the hysterical word of a distressed five-year-old child wouldn't have been hard to discredit. By your own admission, you were traumatized and barely spoke for years. There is also an issue of your age of majority."

"I saw that man beat my mother. I saw him take her out on a third-floor balcony, choke, and throw her to her death! Of course, I was traumatized!" Sarah's voice broke, and she had to take a few deep breaths.

"When I told the Chief of Police what I saw, he told me I imagined it. He told me my mother had run away. I can show you where Davenport buried my mother in the back garden of the house on Wilson Street!"

"I'm not doubting your word," Max said. "But, we are dealing with a dangerous situation and dangerous men. A murderer, and the men who helped him hide it for fifteen years. It would be best to see if I can get the U.S. Marshals involved rather than the local police. The local police seem to be part of the cover-up."

"Will the U.S. Marshals help?" Ardella asked. "I haven't been successful in getting Davenport evicted from a house I legally own. He is trying to sell part ownership in the Observer. He doesn't own the newspaper. I own thirty-five percent, and my son, Richard's share of sixty-five percent was left to his wife Grace and then to my granddaughter."

"That's another problem we need to discuss," Max said. "Davenport's attorney is Seymore Yates. I've handled cases against him before. Yates will twist the facts in favor of his client."

"The only way you'll beat Howard Davenport is to act fast and cut him off at the knees. Yates will fight back, and he'll fight dirty. You are going to have to be equally merciless. How did you gather the evidence you gave my brother?"

"I have my means," Ardella Cameron said.

"Someone who still works at the newspaper," Nick guessed.

Ardella nodded.

"Good, we'll need them. How far are you willing to go to disgrace Howard Davenport?" Max asked.

"Davenport has lived off the bounty of my husband and son's hard work since my daughter-in-law married him. He abused Grace and murdered her. Now he's trying to do the same with Sarah. I want him hanged or put in prison for the rest of his life! What is your opinion of my attorney, Mr. Adams?" Ardella demanded.

"Henry Daniels has a good reputation, but he specializes in family law, not criminal law. Daniels has also lost some of his influence with the court. He's turned most of his practice over to his son," Max said. "Percy Daniels hasn't proven himself yet. I'm afraid the senior might shift your case over to Percy. If that happens, you

might get your home back, Mrs. Cameron, but you won't win on the other issues."

"Can you do better?"

"I believe I can, but it would require a lot of investigation and using what influence I have in the capital to open an investigation. There is no statute of limitations for murder. We would have to move quickly. No matter how you try to keep something like this quiet, it leaks. We need to get Davenport arrested and charged as soon as possible. Then he won't have any legal say about Sarah's inheritance."

"Why would he have any legal say about her inheritance?" Ardella demanded.

"You're not going to want to hear this," Max warned. "Your daughter-in-law might have tried to circumvent the law by stating in her will that Sarah would inherit at age twenty. It would be legal if there was no contest. Davenport, as her stepfather would contest it, and Sarah would have to wait until she reached twenty-one to claim it. By then, he could have damaged her character enough that she would have to prove her competency. We have to get Davenport charged with murder and whatever charges we can prove to destroy his credibility."

"Sarah won't have an inheritance if she has to wait another year," Ardella exclaimed. "Is there some way we can get around it?"

"Easily," Max said. "Sarah can marry someone she trusts. She doesn't need a parent's consent to wed after her sixteenth birthday. Once she is married, she is considered an adult in all manner of the law. The courts would believe she would be under the stewardship of her husband, and she would be allowed to claim her inheritance."

"Which explains why Howard was in such a big hurry to marry me off to Filmore Pugh," Sarah exclaimed. "Filmore is in cahoots with Howard."

"I'm not suggesting you run off and get married," Max said. "I'm simply informing you of what might happen in a worst-case scenario and how you can circumvent it."