

The Pearl Necklace

Caroline was a salaried companion of Margaret Stenton, the wealthy widow of a media tycoon. Margaret, at 55, was still an attractive woman, who socialised with the crème de la crème of New York society. An invitation to her candlelight dinners was much sought after and was considered an accolade.

One day in October 2007, Margaret and Caroline were listening to the lunch-time news, which reported on the robbery in the Avenue Montaigne of Harry Winston's Paris branch. At 5.30 p.m., two well-dressed men and two women entered the store and forced the staff at gun-point to hand over valuable jewels worth in excess of \$100 million. It transpired later that the two women were in fact men, wearing wigs and dresses.

Mrs Stenton was very distressed, as Harry Winston was an old friend of the family. She telephoned him at once in his office on 5th Avenue. He calmed her down, intimating that he was well insured. He then invited her and Caroline for tea the same afternoon. After discussing the robbery and the one a year before, she expressed her concern about the shares in the Harry Winston Diamond Corporation, which she owned and which had dropped by more than 80 percent. He reassured her and disclosed that, in the final quarter, his company would show a profit of more than \$13 million, after the settlement of his insurance claim.

Just before the ladies rose to leave, Harry asked for a necklace to be brought in to show it to Margaret. The pearls were of an exquisite pink hue and Caroline thought it was the most beautiful piece of jewellery that she had ever seen. Harry Winston assured Margaret that they were not cultured, but those for which divers in the Bay of Bengal spend their lives looking. Mrs Stenton decided that she had to have it and wrote out a cheque for a considerable amount there and then.

In the following December, Margaret went on a two-week Caribbean cruise and, as she was accompanied by one of her admirers, she decided to leave Caroline in New York to look after her penthouse.

Although Caroline was disappointed as she had never been to the Caribbean, she was thrilled by the thought that, for fourteen days, she could do as she pleased and escape the daily routine.

One day she was invited to a ball at the Trump Tower. She borrowed one of Margaret's gowns, for which she had permission. She thought that a piece of jewellery would go well with it and, as Margaret had told her the combination of the safe, she decided to select something that would complement the black dress she would wear.

To her surprise the pink pearl necklace was in the safe. She wondered why Margaret had not taken it on her cruise, considering that it was one of her favourites. Caroline decided that it was just the right adornment for her dress, although she had no permission to use Margaret's jewellery.

In the underground car park of the hotel where the ball was being held she was mugged and robbed of the necklace and her handbag. Caroline was devastated. Her first impulse was to contact the police and confess to Mrs Stenton that she had taken the necklace. She quickly changed her mind. Although the contents of the safe were insured, Caroline knew of the exclusion clauses. For one, access to the safe was restricted to Margaret, and every time a piece of jewellery was taken out, the insurance company would have to be informed and a surcharge to the premium was levied. Besides, if she would report the crime, Mrs Stenton might have suspected that she had arranged the mugging herself and at the very minimum she would have lost her position and nobody would ever employ her.

Caroline was now in a state of panic. The only way out would be to replace the necklace. Fortunately, a photograph was available. Her fiancé knew somebody at Tiffany, and she decided to try them first. She showed the manager the photo. He confirmed that they could

make a duplicate, but it would take about five days and would cost a small fortune. Caroline withdrew all her savings, borrowed against her insurance policy and asked her family and friends for loans. She collected the necklace in due course and put it back into the safe, just a day before Margaret returned from her cruise.

This unfortunate incident completely wrecked Caroline's life. In spite of extreme economy she was unable to repay the loans on time. Her friends deserted her and her fiancé broke off the engagement.

Some time later, Mrs Stenton was due to attend a function and invited Caroline to accompany her. She then uttered one sentence to Caroline, which made her go white and break down in floods of tears.

“Harry Winston will be there and he knows an imitation when he sees one, so I had better take the real necklace from the bank vault.”

[840 words]