

INTRODUCTION

This is the story of Mary Blanche Dacier as it was related to me by her daughter Michelle Avilla. Mary- Miss 'D' to her Korean co-workers, Blanche to immediate family, 'D' to friends, - was not the prototypical woman of her day. Even though WWII took the housewives out of the house and into the factories, it was still uncommon for them to take on the role that our 'Not So Virgin Mary' sought out. Enlisting in the Navy, working with classified material, associating with the Korean heads of state (Syngman Rhee and Lee Boem-Soek) and visiting dignitaries all combined in a summation of her character.

Mary attended lavish parties, was in tune with the daily affairs of the newly formed Korean government and gained an affinity for the Korean people. While the dates are historically accurate, there is a lot of literary license taken with the thoughts and actions of the people associated with this story. This is not a historical documentary but a work of historical fiction based on the life of this incredible woman.

Who was Mary? Mary was a proud woman who stepped up to the call of her country, did all that was asked of her and more. After that, she returned to her family, lived a normal life raising her children and passed away unremarked. I think that her story begs to be told and only wish that I could have met this woman to get her story complete with her thoughts on the events. Although, from what I have learned from her family and friends, she very seldom spoke of her history.

Letters home during her overseas adventure were preserved by her father in a scrapbook made out of an old Life magazine that he covered in leather to preserve it. (Letters that she sent home during her overseas adventures were preserved by her father in a scrapbook he fashioned out of an old Life magazine, covered in leather.) I don't know if he did this so that he wouldn't feel bad about wasting material when he cut the page to show the back side of her letters but it was a great way to keep her letters home. These letters helped provide me with insight into what D was

doing at these times and into her thought processes. I've tried to keep the letter contents as accurate as possible, even the leaving in typos and the occasional misspelled word.

Was she undercover for the CIA while working in the office of South Korean President Syngman Rhee and helped him escape from Seoul, South Korea with his family when the North Koreans invaded? You will need to puzzle out the answers to those questions yourselves, dear readers, but I will give you the truth I have uncovered. At the end of the story, there are pictures of documents, photos of people, and many other items of interest from D's days in Korea.

Though this is based on a True Story none of the names used outside of historical references are meant to refer to people dead or living. (Although this rendering is based on a True Story, other than the historical references, no names used within relate to actual people, living or dead.

Chapter 1 – First Meeting and the Beginning

I was sent out on this bullshit assignment, and was not happy about it. I was to interview this elderly woman who had once been someone at the paper (Boston Globe) I was working for, and her story had inspired a once copy-boy, now editor. He had told a long-time associate editor, Ellen Goodman- about her, and Ellen had gone so far as to actually keep in touch with her. Ellen and the woman had decided that it was high time her story, about what happened in the years after WWII with the Korean president, Syngman Rhee, was told.

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If you ask me, it's a bullshit assignment to listen to the ramblings of this woman but I can't get out of it. Now Ellen had major clout with the brass, and I decided it was in my best interest to suck it up and go to get the story.

With that being said, I'm on a flight to Florida to interview 'Mary'. She now lives in a retirement home there so things could be worse. At least I get to go someplace warmer than the cold, snowy New England area for a few days.

The flight to Tampa is pretty routine and boring. Being certain that I'm on an assignment that will go nowhere I indulge in a couple of drinks during the flight. Landing, I'm lured to one of the bars in the airport by a killer smile and a nice pair of legs. I chat my new friend up to find that she's on a mini-vacation of sorts since her flight came in so late that she missed her connection. I commiserate with her and recount a tale or two in that same spirit. Just as I think we're making a real connection she hears her flight announced on the intercom. How she could hear it over the noisy bar I'll never know but she downs her drink and walks away. I admire the sight of her walking away and the old pervert's adage "I hate to see you go but I love to watch you watching you walk away" pops into my head unbidden

I smile briefly, down what's left of my drink and head over to the Taxi Stand. I'm travelling light and just have my carry-on with me so I climb into the first available taxi.

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I wake up the next day with a splitting headache, dry mouth and all the other results of having spent too much time in the hotel bar last night. Mouthwash, toothpaste, a shower and clean set of clothes later and I'm almost feeling human again ... almost.

Through my lingering alcoholic haze, I call down for a taxi before leaving my room. The details of the hotel really escape me except for the extra loud sounds coming from the pool area through the open window at the end of the hall. Why do kids have to be so damned loud anyway? I got up early to catch this interview and stand here waiting for the elevator while being assaulted by their loud splashing and laughing. Glancing down at my watch I confirm that I got up at the crack of noon for this 'important' assignment.

Getting onto the elevator I press the button for the lobby and as the elevator begins its descent, my stomach contents try to work their way up and out but I'm able to keep it together for the short ride. The moment the elevator doors open onto the lobby I frantically reach for the sunglasses in my coat pocket to keep the blinding light from frying my brain pan. I know the cab

will be waiting, but I've got to get something into my stomach to settle it before the long ride to the retirement home. It's not like Ms. Dacier has anywhere to go, so a little delay can't hurt anything.

'How many in your party today?' the cute, young hostess asks.

I don't even bother to answer, I just lower my sunglasses, giving her a good look at my bloodshot eyes. I don't know if it was the red of my eyes or my look of incredulity at her simple-minded question but she just turned on her heel tossing a 'Follow me please' over her shoulder. The dim light of the restaurant made my trip tolerable

'Can you get me a table somewhere away from the windows? And not too close to the kitchen either. I've got a bit of ... a headache.'

'Certainly sir. Your server, Jimmy, will be with you in just a moment.'

The table isn't in front of a window but it was still too bright for my sensitive eyes. I guess I must really be hung over because I didn't even turn to watch the cute hostess walk away. Before I can even open the menu a young man strolls up to the table. He looks as though he'd be more at home down on the beach catching waves than taking orders but his starched white shirt and neatly pressed black pants seem to match the uniform of the day.

'Hi, my name is Jimmy and I'll be your server today. The specials of the day are on the back. The wine list is to your left. Can I get you something to drink while you decide?'

Well my first thought was 'hair of the dog' but I knew that would just lead to me not leaving there anytime soon and I still needed to start that interview today.

'Just water for now, thanks.'

Scanning the menu, I pick out something bland that will stay down and hopefully settle my stomach. I eat, pay my bill leaving Jimmy a decent tip since he was prompt and pretty much left me alone and head out front to the Taxi Stand. I'm feeling better but I keep my shades on for the ride. No sense advertising to the driver that I'm hung over. The day's warm and the sun is helping heat up the cab. I lay my head back and close my eyes to the blinding light. Next thing I know the cabbie is telling me that we're there.

I pay the man and step out of the cab into the humidity of pre-spring Florida. Suddenly I'm not feeling so well again but I'm a professional and I have a job to do so I forge onward. Before I get close enough to knock, the door's thrown open and a woman stands there, framed in the opening.

'Well it's 'bout damned time you got here! I was expecting you an hour ago. Don't just stand there, come on in and let's get this show on the road. I'm D by the way.'

Without looking back D walks back into her living room and sits in the easy chair. I look around and it's a nice one-floor job with wide doorways. It's nothing spectacular but comfy and clean. I take a seat on the sofa across from D and take out both my recorder and note pad.

'I'm sorry Ms Dacier, they lost my luggage, the flight was late, traffic out of the city was horrible, some kind of accident or other. Anything that could have gone wrong did.'

After a long hard stare 'Call me D ... I don't imagine the hangover helped any either now did it? I could smell you getting out of the cab, boy. No need to try to bullshit an old bullshitter, it won't work. Now sit down and I'll get you something to drink ... a little hair of the dog junior?'

'Just some Coke will do me fine ... D. Thanks.'

With a slight smirk on her lips, D turns and heads into the kitchen and quickly returns with a couple of glasses filled with ice and Coke. Looking at the moisture running down the side

of the glasses I feel like I could easily break out in a similar sweat as my stomach seems to have a mind of its own. So I reach for the glass, take a sip then sit back to see D watching me intently.

‘So what should I call you? I could keep calling you Junior or Sonny or some other derogatory term if you like.’

‘I’m sorry; I should have introduced myself properly.’

I reach into my jacket searching for one of my business cards. D is watching and appears to be enjoying my discomfort from the smile just touching the ends of her lips. My fingers brush against a card in my pocket but it seems to elude my grasp. Feeling a bit awkward, I twist a bit to get my hand deeper into the pocket. At last I have the card in my grasp and quickly hand it over to D. She scans it quickly before looking up with barely held in check laughter lurking behind her eyes.

‘Well thank you Sarah, but I don’t think I have any need for whole-sale pharmaceuticals today.’

I could feel my face flush with embarrassment as I realize I gave her the card I’d gotten from the woman at the airport lounge. Reaching into the outside pocket of my sports coat I find the stack of my business cards there and snag one as I reach for the card being proffered by D.

‘I’m so sorry Ms, ... sorry ... D. I’ll take that. Here’s one of mine. Please forgive the mistake, I’m Bill Sidwell.’”

Of course, right about then my cell chimed with an incoming text message. What else could go wrong? This woman must think that the paper had sent her a complete idiot or cub reporter.

‘Excuse me a second please.’

Without waiting for a response I check my message. Of course, it’s from the paper seeing if I made it to my assignment since I didn’t check-in with them. Now I’m both embarrassed and frustrated so I turn off the phone and drop it back into my pocket.

Looking up, I see D coming out of another room carrying a big box of ‘stuff’.

‘If I’m gonna tell you the story, you’re gonna need to see some of the evidence I kept around all these years. I (just) call them memories but they’re also proof that I was actually part of a very exciting and terrifying time.’



The first thing out of the box is an obviously old photograph of a female sailor. It takes me a few seconds to realize that it’s a picture of D. She lays it on the table with a sigh. A moment of silence ensues then D gets up again headed back to (the) kitchen. I hear the unmistakable clinking of glass from the other room. D comes back with yet another tray. Only this time the tray has a bottle of scotch, some ice and a couple of glasses.

‘I think we’re both going to need this before the interview is done.’

I nod in agreement and D reaches for the box again. As she turns back to me her hands have a clear plastic bag full of very old photos.(Or-She turns back to me with a plastic bag filled with old photographs.) Most of them look to be black & white photos. It

appeared to be about 40 to 50 photos. The bag is plopped down on the coffee table between the two trays.

Without preamble, D starts 'Well let's start this story early in the spring of 1941. Germany and Adolf are hammering Europe while the Japs are taking over the Pacific ...'