

Times Past

By Dr. Katherine E. A. Korkidis

Flaming ambers in the night glowing with a ghostly light.

It was a cold and dreary night and she could feel the coldness of the night surround her body and enfold her soul. She walked slowly to the door compelled by some unknown force and flung it open, silently praying that only the night lies beyond her doorstep. There in the shadows stood a man or was he a man. The wind howled wildly through the trees, and as the branches gave way to their invader, the form began to move towards her. Her body and her will were paralyzed. She stood awaiting what was to come. From the darkness emerged two large, dark hypnotic eyes. As they stared deeply into hers, she could feel her soul burning with a fear beyond description. Yet within the bounds of her fear, a sense of compassion and understanding for this stranger began to take form. As the fear slowly subsided, she stared at the man who now stood steadfastly before her. His eyes were mirrors reflecting the brilliance of the moon, burning brightly as two flames in the night. The fire within his eyes seemed dangerously close, almost totally encompassing her, yet she stood there motionless intrigued by their beauty and longing for their warmth. He extended his hand at the moment she extended hers, almost as if their minds were one, and now the bridge to their souls was complete. And as if they were one, nature too seemed to respond to their peaceful embrace. Yet with the dying of the howling wind, came a sound more frightening and disturbing than ever before. For it was now that the cries from the village could be heard. She felt her arms relax and as she looked up the man was gone. Could she had imagined this beautiful moment? Who was this man? Could he somehow be the source of these horrific cries? As the cries grew louder and closer, she could not ignore them any longer. Her thoughts were interrupted by a loud

banging on her door. It was neighbors from the village below. They were angry and fearful. They banged on the door with such conviction she was compelled to open it.

“Have you seen him?” They asked. “Who?” She responded. “A man with a knife running from the village.” “He was heading in this direction.” “We are pursuing him and plan to capture him.” She was convinced it could not be the man that entered her home only a few moments ago. So she answered with determination to protect this man. As to why she was protecting this man she had no idea. “I have been reading and have not seen anyone”. “He must have gone beyond my home.” Her word was taken, as she was a respected member of the village, the village teacher. The two men left with no objections. As soon as the men were gone, the stranger reappeared at the window. He knocked gently and she reopened the door to him once more. As he entered, she could see his features with much clarity. He was tall, possibly over six feet, with dark brown hair and sparkling kind brown eyes. He was a handsome man with a soft and gentle way. This could not be the killer they were searching for, she thought. Yet one never knows the workings of another’s mind. Can a killer appear so calm and gentle? He asked if he could sit down on an armchair in her family room. A small room that accommodated a TV, a small settee, and a roaring fire. She did not know what to say except to offer her guest a cup of tea. He accepted but had one request – could it be a cup of black tea with a blend of jasmine. She was surprised in that it was her favorite. He asked if she would join him. She felt no fear, just peace, so she did. She looked for signs of violence, blood stains on his clothes, his hands, but there were none. Once the tea was ready, they both relaxed in that small room with the warmth of the fire. Nothing was said between them just a gentle smile. He knew he could trust her and she him. It seemed as time stood still, then he spoke. “My name is Daniel, thank you for offering me a refuge from the cold.” “You are most kindly welcome”, she replied. “My name is Samantha, but all call me Sam. You may do so if you wish.” “I know you Sam, he replied, from days past.”

“Have we met before, she asked.” “Yes, he said, many years ago.” As a young woman in her mid-twenties, she did not have much of a past that she did not remember. “I am so very sorry, she said, but I do not remember you. Can you recount our past meeting?” “With time you will remember, but for now I need your help. A murder was committed in the village and I would ask your help in solving it.” Sam had a keen interest in solving puzzles and could not resist the challenge. His kind and gentle eyes beckoned her, so she accepted. She asked about the men that came to her door, He did not seem to care much for their quest, so the matter appeared settled for now. It was getting late and after the third cup of tea she offered him lodging for the night. She had an extra guest bedroom that would suit him nicely. He agreed and assured her she would be safe. Something within her believed him and showed him the room. He thanks her with a kiss upon the cheek and went promptly to bed. The next morning, she was awoken by inviting smells emanating from her kitchen. He had prepared a breakfast feast of all her favorites. All were laid out on a set table with her best linen. As they both indulged in this feast, he asked her again if she could begin the work of solving the village murder that very day. Although it was Sunday, she told him she would head to the village church and see what she could learn. He asked to remain behind. The village elder was also the village pastor. His name was Jonathan Martin and he was a pastor of the village for the past 50 years. He was well respected and loved by the villagers. He was known for his informative and uplifting homilies. Although his homilies were always full of optimism, on this particular morning it was dark and morose. He spoke of the sadness for the loss of a wonderful man, full of life and full of promise. He was to be the new pastor of the village as Father John, as the villagers called him, was soon to retire. He came from far away and was murdered in the village the day he arrived. Sam realized she would have her work cut out for her to find the motive in this senseless killing.

The key to any discovery was to be discreet in one's dealings with others. Asking too many questions too quickly might arouse suspicion and alert the wrong parties. Sam choose to speak only with Fr. John for now, privately, before exploring other options. To access a newly established scene of the crime was difficult at best. The new pastor was killed in his room in the rectory while Fr. John was away. There were no witnesses, no theories, and no suspects. The local authorities, just the same, treated this room as a crime scene. Fr. John's anguish to solve this murder gave Sam the time she needed. As per motive, Fr. John had very little to offer. Sam searched the empty room. There was but one suitcase on the bed which the authorities had opened. The contents were non informative as to where this man came from and why he was no longer with them. The only other object in the room was on his table to the right of his bed. On his bedtable was his Bible with an inscription, '*To My Dearest and Oldest Friend, May God Bless and Keep you always, Your Sam.*' Sam was taken aback. The handwriting was hers, or so it seemed, yet she does not remember writing this, and to whom she gave it to, if she did.

Sam decided it was best to return home and speak with Daniel. She did not understand how she knew both men and when. Daniel was not there when she entered her home. He appeared at her door again later that evening. Sam told him about her discoveries so far. He told her he believed that she and only she could solve this murder. The discussion went no further. He said he was tired and went straight to the guest room. Sam could not sleep as she tossed and turned wondering how she was involved with both men. Could she be mistaken about the handwriting? She needed to return to the room of interest, and so she did the next day after lessons. She taught in a small schoolhouse which included all ages in one room. It was a challenge yet very rewarding as the older students helped to teach the young ones. She loved her students and in return was loved by them.

Father John opened the door once more for Sam. She examined the position of each of the evidence indicators left there by the CSI team. The attack on this young pastor seemed one that was preplanned, preempted and executed with no warning. It seemed to be one of rage and hatred. There was some evidence of a struggle. The apparent information from the scene was in the ME's office. Sam needed access to her report, but how. There was a back door she could take advantage of. Her assistant at the schoolhouse on occasion was Mary McKnight, also known as the village Medical Examiner (ME), would her friend allow her access that remained to be seen. A visit was in order. Sam went to see Mary and explained how she is independently reviewing this case. She told her that she saw the crime scene twice and came to some limited conclusions. She needed Mary's help to analyze what she saw. "It looks like this young man put up quite a fight..." Sam concluded. "Yes, as you can see from the splatters of blood on the wall it was a pretty messy death. Not that there's ever anything not messy about death", said Mary. "So, Mary can you tell me what you believe happened?" Mary took her over to the body on the slab. Sam thought the man looked familiar, but her focus was the crime. "Well, as you can see on the body, there are two puncture wounds, one to the neck, and the other to the heart. Now, those splatters on the wall that you saw occurred when the suspect stabbed the victim in the neck; he hit the carotid artery, you see, causing the blood to come out in spurts. When you hit a major artery like that, a great loss of blood occurs within only a few seconds." "Mary can you explain further. What does this mean?" said Sam. Mary replied, "meaning that the victim lost consciousness very quickly, so there was no way he could defend himself against the second attack when the suspect aimed for the heart. He fell where he stood and died almost instantly. Now, the large bloodstain that seeped under the body mostly came from the wound to the neck. The wound to the heart bled a little and that's only because the suspect pulled out the knife from the heart of the victim -and as you probably noticed

the murder weapon is nowhere to be seen. We have yet to find it. You see, if he had left it in, there would be almost no blood from that wound, the knife would have acted as a sort of plug."

"Mary any idea as to the time of death" Sam asked. "It was evening, but I am still looking into the exact time." "Any idea as to the motive" Sam asked. "Not as yet. The police are looking into the background of the pastor." For now, Sam had some information that she could bring back to Daniel.

Later that evening Sam returned home with the idea of cooking a wonderful dinner for Daniel and to tell him of her discoveries. Yet when she arrived home, Daniel was gone. He did not have any belongings when he entered her life and now nothing was left behind except for one short note left on her kitchen table. *'To My Dearest Sam'* was written on the outside of the envelope. On a small piece of paper, the following was written, *'Thank you for your faith in me and for the information you have given me so far. Please continue to solve this murder as a favor to me. When you are done, and the true suspect is caught I will explain why this is so important to me. I will return at the time. May God Bless and Keep you always. Faithfully Yours Forever, Daniel'.*

Sam was saddened by his absence but even more determined to find the answers to this puzzle. She was looking forward to seeing Daniel once again but was puzzled by his disappearance. For now, she was simply grateful for the time they spent together and for knowing him. The hope of seeing him again was her incentive to work harder and more diligently. Sam decided to integrate herself into the investigation. Being a woman of education, she was often called upon by the local authorities to help. The village police force was a group of three individuals, a captain, a deputy and the medical examiner. Sam was well known and respected by Captain Bill, as he was often called. Upon visiting the Captain, Sam asked if she could help with the research and forensics of this case. Captain Bill was most grateful for the extra assistance since this case was indeed difficult.

He gave Sam the case file to review. Other than the medical examiner's report there was very little information as to who this young pastor might have been and as to his acquaintances. His name was Nathaniel Worthington and he came from a small nearby village. He completed his seminarian studies followed by his graduate work in Theology. He was twenty-five years old and this was to be his first posting. He accepted this position as a replacement for Father John but was not as yet a practicing pastor. Father John would have been an excellent mentor, thought Sam. Nathaniel came from a financially secure and loving family. He was an only child with many friends. His colleagues and professors at the seminary respected him. He was given glowing reviews by all those that Captain Bill interviewed, and Nathaniel had touched during his short life. There was nothing in this man's background except good will. Sam was determined to find his secret. Someone out there did not feel as positive about this young man, but why. There must be a reason as to why he was murdered, and she knew she could find it.

Time past and her faith in her ability to find the answers began to waver. She had some holiday time coming up when the schoolhouse would be closed. She decided to visit the village that Nathaniel called home. They were now on a first name basis as she continued to invade his past life. He was no older than her and in that short time he lived an exemplary life. His studies, family and friends were his life, not unlike hers. The village was a short six hours' drive in the northern most part of this region. It was isolated in a valley amongst tall majestic snowcapped mountains. Sam was enthralled by the beauty of this place. She found lodging easily and decided to spend the day admiring the beauty and peace around her. She would meet with his family the next morning. Nathaniel's home was as elegant as the village itself. It was perched on a hill overlooking all and surrounded by thick woods and those mountains. As she approached the door, an older man opened it. He said he was expecting her, and she could proceed into the main hall. Two staircases

emerged from the hall and met on the floor above. The older man asked her to wait there and took her coat. A woman came from one of the rooms to greet Sam. She introduced herself as Mrs. Worthington but "please call me Agatha", she said. Sam exchanged her name. The woman was an older lady with many pleasing features. She guided Sam into a sitting room and called out to the older man. "Sam would you like something to drink, perhaps tea." Sam agreed. Mrs. Worthington asked the man to proceed to prepare the tea. Sam discussed the purpose of her visit after first giving her condolences for this loss. Mrs. Worthington was grateful that Sam had taken on this case. She could not understand who would do this to her son. Sam assured her that she would find the guilty party. All was as she had read in the limited police report, yet there was something missing. Nathaniel's father had passed many years prior and Mrs. Worthington had moved back to her home village with her son after her husband's death. Nathaniel spent his early growing years elsewhere. Sam being focused on Nathaniel's current years did not ask the begging question. The interview was soon over, and the rest of the afternoon was spent admiring the gardens and the palatial views. The next day brought more of the same as Sam spoke with many friends and neighbors. Nathaniel was loved by so many. He was destined to be a pastor in service of others. This was indeed well recognized and understood. She needed to find answers but her time for doing so was quickly coming to a close. She had one more day but was no further in her search for the truth. Sam returned to Nathaniel's home to visit with his mother. She asked to see his bedroom for further clues. To her astonishment there was a picture of a young girl, no more than 9 years old, standing near the desk. The little girl was smiling and had her arm around a young boy. They appeared as good friends. Yet what concerned and confused Sam was that she knew the young girl in the photo. As she looked intently at the picture she remembered when it was taken. It was in her days at school. The boy in the picture was carrying her schoolbooks as he did every day since they were five years old.

Why did Nathaniel have this picture? Was he the young man in the photo? She had moved away and so did he and they had lost each other. Over the years she thought of him often, but life took its course. Yet his name was not the same. His name was Daniel not Nathaniel. If he was her Daniel, then life has played out a cruel deed to allow her to find him only to lose him again. She needed to talk further with Nathaniel's mother. Nathaniel's mother revealed that he choose to use his middle name in school, a personal preference. She remembered his best friend, Samantha, and how difficult it was for him to lose her when her family moved away. She told Sam how he choose to never date in the hope of one day finding her again. Mrs. Worthington could not believe that Samantha, the young woman helping to solve her son's murder, was the young girl that was always in Nathaniel's heart. They both embraced as Sam decided to depart. She was now more than ever determined to find the answer. As she headed back home all the memories of her early childhood with Daniel came rushing back. It brought her much joy yet much sadness. She wondered why she never choose to find him once again. Why did he not choose to do so? Sometimes we are distracted as to the needs of our heart by the rationales of our mind. She remembered the Bible in Nathaniel's room. It was indeed signed by her. It was a gift she gave him as they parted ways, those many years ago. Even as a child he loved to read the Scriptures. It was a gift he treasured because it was from Sam. When all would be done she will resolve to return it to his mother and his home, where it belongs. She was glad to be back home but now more confused than when she left. As she approached her front door a beautifully wrapped box adorned her home. She picked up the box and brought it in to further examine. There was but a simple note, 'From an admirer'. The contents were personal and beautiful. Twelve long stemmed yellow roses with a red sash. A bottle of French Bordeaux wine and two glasses. 'Sam, drink with me' was written on the glasses with red ink. Sam assumed it was from Daniel. She would have preferred Daniel himself but she understood he could not be there.

It was a thoughtful and caring gift. The wine she will save for his return. Sam returned to her classes the next day joyous knowing that Daniel shared her feelings. Days became weeks and she was no closer to an answer. Soon the case of the murder of Nathaniel Worthington was becoming a cold case. Time past and gifts would continue to appear by her door. Each gift more telling than the last. Was Daniel stalking her? He knew her tastes and interests. But how? If he was watching her why not approach her? Nothing made sense anymore. She felt she was being watched. She talked to Captain Bill for comfort. He could not find anything. She decided to ignore all and focus on her daily life and her students. One day as she was returning home from the schoolhouse, she saw a man, not unlike Daniel, standing near her door. He hurried away. In that glimpse she saw aggravation and annoyance. The gift at her door this time was not beautiful but very personal. It was a gift-wrapped bloody knife. She immediately took it to Mary and Captain Bill to examine. It was indeed covered with Nathaniel's blood. There were no fingerprints, just blood. Both Captain Bill and Mary expressed their concern. Captain Bill insisted on surveillance to protect Sam. Sam declined. She felt she could protect herself but was not sure if she was being overconfident. Days became weeks and all was quiet. Sam continued her investigation into the death of Nathaniel with very little insight. The case was indeed getting cold. All pointed to someone that knew Nathaniel yet no one with that rage could be found. Sam lacked a connection that she desperately needed. She still felt she was being watched and hoped that Daniel would return. She felt safe and at peace with him. The weeks became months, and someone entered into Sam's home while she was at the schoolhouse. They went through her closets and drawers taking clothes and personal objects. Sam was convinced it was a burglary and treated it as such. Captain Bill was not convinced. The nature of the objects taken were too personal to be a simple burglary. He was convinced that Sam has a stalker independent of the murder. He tried once more to

convince Sam to accept help, she refused. Captain Bill took it upon himself to watch over her. He would watch her home to insure no one entered while she was away. Every evening he would call her or ask Mary to call to make sure all was secure for the night. Weeks past once again with no reoccurrences. It is now six months since the death of Nathaniel. She began to feel that there must be a connection between Nathaniel's death, Daniel, her stalker and herself. But what could it be. She wished Daniel would return so she could explore this belief further. Soon enough the answer came in a form of a threat. Her stalker had decided it was time. One evening as Sam was relaxing from a long day came a knock on the door. It was Captain Bill. She let him in with the hope of more information on Nathaniel's death. Instead Captain Bill had a note from the stalker telling him to remove his protection of Sam. The note talked about his long-term relationship of Sam knowing her since they were children. He felt he knew what was best for Sam. He and only he could take care of her. As Captain Bill read on Sam could not understand how this man knew her and why he felt "he was her destiny one way or another". The ending sentence to a strange note. Captain Bill was more determined than before to put Sam in a protective environment. Once again Sam refused and felt this man was not a threat. She was indeed foolhardy, and she was about to find out. Captain Bill left a frustrated man yet determined to continue his surveillance undetected by Sam. Sam read the note again and again with no resolution. So she was the target of this man yet he was the person of interest in the death of Nathaniel. She was now as tied to this man as she was to Nathaniel. And where does Daniel fit into this complex story? she thought. A week passed and as she returned home that evening a note was left on her door. It was written by her stalker; whose identity was still unknown. It was addressed to Sam this time and this time it frightened her. It was a note filled with anger and rage. "If you continue to ignore me you will regret it. I killed to make you mine and now you owe me", were the opening sentences. The rest of the note continue in this tone. With

each sequential sentence came a threat more frightening than before. He described in detail the torture he would induce for her complacency and rejection. Sam finally realized she could not contain this man's hatred and violence anymore. She needed to find a way to protect herself. She immediately called Captain Bill who happened to be just outside her home. She told him to please accept her apologies for being so determined and to provide her with the protection she needed. Captain Bill agreed and with one phone call set up all that was needed. Sam felt safe once again. The matter was put to rest for a little while. Sam was determined to find the identity of this stalker because she now knew he had killed Nathaniel for her. One dark and cold night Sam came home. She said hello to her protector parked outside her home. He smiled and wished her a good night. Hours later as Sam finally fell into a quiet sleep she was awoken by a loud noise. It came from within her home. It sounded like something falling in the darkness that surrounded her. She jumped up and before she could turn on the lights, she felt cold hands around her neck. She tried to scream but could not. Consciousness was drifting away as the hands tightened. As she awoke fearing the worse, she found herself tied to a chair in an unfamiliar setting. In front of her stood a man that was indeed a stranger. He was tall, not unlike her Daniel, and handsome to some degree. His sandy hair was disheveled, and his hands covered in blood. It could not be her blood, she felt no pain, she thought, yet she could not move. The binds on her arms and legs had numbed her limbs. She thought it best to speak to him. She asked him his name and told him hers. He stared at her with those angry eyes and did not speak. She repeated her query. He spoke with a deep voice and told her David. She remembered a boy named David in her youth. Could this be the same one? She asked if they had met before. His anger escalated as he now induced pain in Sam. She could feel the blood running and knew she was hurt. He began to tell her that she never saw him only Nathaniel. He was the one from her youth. A scrawny child with much anger. She would avoid him as he followed her everywhere, she would go.

Nathaniel was her protector if he got to close, as close as a young child can get. She felt pity for this lost boy and would try to speak with him but only with Nathaniel by her side. Where was he now? Nathaniel was dead and this man was alive. She lost her protector and now needed to protect herself. Sam decided to reach the heart of the man that once loved her. It was her only weapon for survival. She told David she too has feelings for him. David did not believe her, and his anger struck her once more. He said he knew that was not true. He saw her with Nathaniel those many years ago and wished he was the one she loved. It was now too late. He had killed Nathaniel and now he must kill her. He pulled out a knife no different than the one that was used on Nathaniel. He told her that she would feel every blow and pray for that one final blow. Her death would not be swift but slow and torturous. Sam needed to act before the first blow. She tried one more time to engage him in conversation. She took him back to the times they did speak. She was trying to show her kindness once again. He was indeed a tortured soul. David held the knife as an extension of his hand but listened patiently as Sam repainted the picture of their youth. Time that seemed eternal passed and Sam calmed this troubled soul. He put down the knife and told her of his tempestuous youth and of those moments he spent with her and the consoling they brought. Sam stayed with this discourse. Eventually she convinced him to undo the bindings. She looked around in the hope of determining her mode of escape. It seemed to be an old dwelling. She asked David if this was his home. He responded that it once belonged to a relative long gone. He lived here now. They were in a small room with no windows, one door, with many weapons at his disposal all neatly laid out. There was a table next to her chair that was stained with blood as was the floor. This room was used before. Could David had killed others, she wondered. She decided she was not to be one more. She reached out her hand and held his. Her touch was gentle and most welcome. For a moment, David felt love and peace, yet his

anger quickly took it away. He pulled his hand away and told her to never do this again. So she did as she was told. He told her it was time and she must not scream no matter the pain. He said he would not gag her if she agreed. She agreed. He told her to lie on the table and he would have to bind her once more. As she approached the table, she noticed that the door was ajar. This was her defining moment. She had to take it. She ran. She tried to lock the door behind him, but his strength was beyond hers. She ran through the house to the front door with her stalker on her tail. As she opened the door and he swept the knife across her back barely missing her, a man was standing there. It was Daniel. She knew he was there to save her. He grabbed towards the knife and as the two men struggled, she tried to intervene. David was defeated and fell upon the ground on his own knife. Sam was now safe, and Daniel brought her home after the inquiry. Daniel stayed with Sam until she finally fell asleep.

The next morning Sam awoke hoping all was a dream. Soon she realized it was not and called out for Daniel. He was gone once again. This time he left a lengthy letter to Sam.

To my dearest Sam,

I owe you my life and much gratitude for finding my murderer. You see, Sam, I am your Nathaniel. I knew David as you did when we were young. He was a troubled young man yet he loved you dearly, as did, do, I. I knew that he had found you and I came as soon as I could to be your protector once more. He recognized me upon my arrival and subsequently surprised and killed me. Sam I must now return to where I need to be. I am sad to leave you, but happy to know you are now safe. I will always watch over you for all your days. Know that I will always love you and maybe one day we will meet again.

May God Bless and keep you each and every day, Faithfully Yours, Forever, Daniel.

THE END
