



The Secret Layer

By

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Chapter One

Christmas 1959

Emily was exhausted. Her fingers ached and her head hurt. But she was happy. She looked around her small bedroom littered with bits and pieces of every color of fabric in the rainbow. Yellow, black, and brown yarn lay in tiny balls at her feet. Small plastic eyes stared up blankly at the ceiling. Emily rubbed her own eyes and stretched.

Making her family and friends something for Christmas was giving her a great sense of achievement. Her Grandmother had actually come up with the idea. She was the one person in the world that Emily could always count on and Emily loved her more than anyone else in the world. Granny Millie was tiny and had tight white curls that lay flat against her head. Emily would tell her all of her deep dark secrets. Not that she really had anything to tell. She would look into her beautiful sea blue eyes and pour out her confessions of love and hate. Her grandmother took her as serious as a heart attack, as she was fond of saying. She never laughed at Emily's confessions, only smiled and nodded before giving Emily deeply thought out advice.

Some thought her grandmother old and senile. But, Emily knew better. Emily closed her eyes

and pretended her grandmother was right there sitting in her room with her. A smile crawled across her face. She knew her grandmother would stroke each doll and lovingly pat it on its yarn head and then tell her how proud she was of her.

Her grandmother only stood five foot one and probably didn't weight more than one hundred pounds, but she was a powerful woman. She heard everything and saw everything. Not much escaped her.

Her knowledge of current events always impressed and fascinated Emily. She knew politics and who to vote for and had never missed stepping into the voting booth and pulling that curtain as if it were the grandest thing on earth to do. She had voted through rain, shine, snow or sleet, threats of tornadoes and floods each and every election day since women had won the right back in 1920.

She was a staunch Democrat and really didn't care who the candidate was as long as he was a Democrat. She would support him fiercely and knew everything a candidate stood for along with his issues, his platform, his views, his wife's name and his children's names.

Granny Millie had lived with her family until late last summer and she missed her greatly. But, the "family" had decided it was best for the old woman to live with her mother's sister in South Carolina. Emily felt a tinge of sadness creep through her body. She wished she could hug her grandmother right now and smell the sweet lilac

scent she wore. That smell always made Emily feel warm, wanted and secure.

Emily shook her head. "Now, now, young Em. Don't go tearin' up on me now."

Emily smiled. That's exactly what her grandmother would have told her.

She thought of her upcoming summer visit to her grandmother in South Carolina. She was going to fly. Her Grandmother had promised she would send an airplane ticket for her. Emily couldn't imagine what it was going to be like to soar through the air high above the world, flying with the birds. She knew she would love it because her grandmother had told her she would.

"Oh, 'tis a grand thing to fly my child. All of the houses look small as toys and cars are so tiny you'd think they were ants marching down the road. You never see people. Plain too small," her grandmother had said. Emily picked up one of the rag dolls she had so meticulous crafted and sewn that day. She stroked its long strands of yellow hair with a certain pride and love just as a mother would stroke her daughter's hair.

"I'll name you Lilly. And I'll make you a little necklace with your name stitched on it so you'll never forget."

Emily reached for her yarn, cloth, and sewing needle. With deftness and a skill beyond her twelve years, she sewed the name on the cloth. She brought the small square of fabric close to her eyes because the lettering had to be so small and exact. She could not chance missing a stitch. She smiled

as she worked. She couldn't wait until her cousin Mary Jo opened her gift. She knew Mary Jo would love Lilly as much as she did.

Emily finished the doll's necklace and tied it around her neck. She gently placed the cherished piece in a box and wrapped the beautiful handmade gift of love with the paper from left over brown grocery bags. Emily used the remaining yarn to fashion a ribbon on the package. Carefully she wrote her cousin's name on the package.

"To Mary Jo. Merry Christmas. From Emily. There, two down and three more to go. Granny, I am cookin' now!" Emily squealed.

Emily worked into the late hours finishing each doll and carefully placing each one lovingly in its box, covering it first with newspaper and then wrapping it with the brown paper from the store. Even with left over materials, Emily managed to make each package look festive. She glued stars and bells and angels on the boxes and she carefully wrote her name to and from on each one. When the last one was finished, Emily tried to move her fingers.

"Ouch! This manual labor stuff is hard!" Emily said to no one but herself.

Suddenly the quiet of the night made Emily feel very alone. Her mother had yelled good night to her hours ago after having a few cocktails. Emily knew she was snoring on the couch. Sometimes she wished her mother would just sit with her and talk. Just talk.

"What did you do today in school, Emily?"

Was that too much to ask? Emily longed for her mother to get to know her. But she knew in her heart that would never happen. Emily's mother worked hard cleaning other people's houses in the little town of Sevierville, Tennessee. She took in laundry two days a week and was a seamstress in any spare time she happened to have. She was always working. Emily couldn't really fault her mother. She just wished she could have a little part of her.

Emily thought of her father. She wished she could be his little girl. The little girl she saw in magazines getting a welcome home hug and kiss from the tall man in the business suit after his long day at the office.

Emily's dad wasn't a large man, but he was built solid and could squeeze the life out of you with his tight muscles and hard callused hands. He had worked at Brogan's Chair Factory since he left school in the fifth grade. For some reason which Emily could not explain, she was proud of him. She really didn't care that he didn't wear a business suit. He didn't even own a suit. She just really wanted more time with him. But he was like her mother. Always working and always tired.

Emily surveyed her day's work. She was satisfied with herself and was more excited about giving her friends and cousins and grandmother the dolls than she was about getting anything for herself. She couldn't wait to hear their squeals of delight.

Emily truly couldn't remember when she had been happier. She crawled into bed with the doll she had made for herself.

"Oh Patsy, Santa will be here before we know it. Just seven more days then everyone can see your friends. And you will have someone to play with, too," Emily said sweetly to the doll she cradled in her arms.

Emily kissed her doll good night and like a beautiful young child on the verge of young womanhood, she sank into a deep peaceful sleep of dreams of her grandmother. They were laughing and cooking brownies, but something kept shaking her. Emily laughed at her grandmother, but the hand grabbed her again.

"Emily, wake up, Emily," the voice said. "No, I don't want to," Emily begged. She didn't want to listen to the voice but it persisted. The brownies and the dreams of a new Barbie doll slowly began to vanish.

Emily's two uncles, Delbert and Roy, had spent the last four hours at the Elm Grove Tavern consuming a bottle of Jack Daniel's whiskey and chasing each shot with a bottle of beer. Nothing was unusual about this. They were a familiar sight in the small town nestled in the foothills of the Great Smokey Mountains. They were the town's twin drunks. They would usually end each night, staggering down the street, holding onto each other as they made their way stumbling toward their rented trailer. But, as the wind whipped cold

against their drunken breaths, they thought their sister's house was closer and warmer.

Delbert fumbled in his pockets looking for a key. Roy picked up the torn straw mat from the front step and clumsily grabbed the spare key.

"This what ya lookin' fer?"

Delbert snatched it roughly away. "Don't be playin' games with me, you son of a bitch. I'm freezin' my ass off and here you are takin' the damn keys out of my pocket, you moron."

Roy started to respond but forgot he had just found the key. "Sorry, bro."

The pair tumbled into the small foyer. Marjorie's loud rhythmic snoring filled the air causing the men to break into a rumble of snickering.

"Go Marjorie. Go Marjorie," Delbert chanted as he crawled up to his sleeping sister and threw the blanket over her.

"Check the frig. Gotta be some brew in there," he ordered.

Roy grinned showing the hole where his two front teeth had been before a bar fight had rendered him near dead and minus his pearly whites.

"Here drinky, drinky," he giggled. Delbert put his finger to lips, "Shhh. Don't be wakin' her up. Follow me."

Delbert tip-toed the best he could without falling. Roy swayed holding onto the walls for support as he followed Delbert and fell in step

behind him. They opened Emily's door and both slipped inside. Delbert pointed to her and a sickening grin spread across his face. Roy smiled and gave Delbert a thumb's up sign as he turned and locked the door behind him.

They staggered to Emily's bed. Delbert sat on the edge and took Patsy from Emily's slim arms. He tossed the newly made doll to Roy who immediately lifted its skirt causing both of them to giggle. Delbert began shaking Emily, gently at first, then roughly.

Emily didn't know why the hand wanted to wake her from her wonderful dreams. She was tired and she and her Grandmother were laughing. Emily could almost smell the brownies they were baking. But the hand continued to shake her. Emily laid there willing it to go away until she heard her uncle's voice telling her to awake.

When she did, she didn't understand what was going on. Maybe they were there to tell her something had happened to her grandmother. But, she knew that wasn't true when she took a breath and smelled the pungent smell of liquor fill her room. She reached for her doll that Roy was playing with just as he began pulling Patsy's hair out. The two men giggled like school children.

"You don't need no dollies no more to play with. You a big girl now. Say bye-bye to dolls and hello to the real world. Why Em, we've come to change ya from a girlie to a woman, haven't we Roy?" Delbert cooed, keeping his hand firmly over

Emily's mouth, using his other arm to bear down on her chest pinning her to her bed.

Fear and bile arose in Emily all at once. She wanted to scream. She wanted to run. She needed to scream and run. She tried to free herself but it was useless.

"Oh come on Emmy. You gonna like it and you might as well get taught by family. 'Sides, we need ya to help us out tonight, don't we Roy?" growled Delbert mean and low.

He glared into Emily's eyes and seeing her fright, it excited him even more. Turning to Roy, he simply said, "This is gonna be fun."

Emily froze when the dirty big hand reached under her gown and pulled her panties down. She tried in vein to wiggle. She needed to free her arm. Just run and escape. Just move enough to scream she thought. Surely her mother would hear her. Surely her father's shift at the factory would be over and he would come home and save her. Surely someone would help her. Time froze. No one came to her rescue.

Both men took turns crawling on top of her. Each would fumble at first then pump and grind and fondle her small breasts bruising them. They squirmed and moved until Emily thought she would throw up and choke to death on her own vomit. The pain seared through to her very soul.

Then something in Emily died. She became very still and let them finish. They licked her and touched her and turned her over. Emily never knew a human being could be put through so much

disgusting pain and yet, still be alive. She was sure she was on the verge of death. She knew she was praying for death to come now and take her.

Her Uncle Roy watched his older brother grunting over the small clump of a child in her bed of pink and white flowers and lace trim. He spied the beautifully wrapped packages and began to unravel the yarn strings fashioned into bows. As Delbert groaned and moaned and slobbered all over Emily, Roy dismembered her dolls. Finished, both men gave each other a slap on the back.

Delbert leaned over close to Emily, almost touching her tear stained face, whispering, "If you're a thinkin' you might want to share with someone 'bout tonight, I'd be thinkin' twice if I was you. If you so much as make a mention of this, I'll kill your precious grandma and your ma and then I'll bring my friends back round here to visit you a whole lot more. You understand girl?"

Emily didn't move. She just lay there. Roy and Delbert chuckled as Roy threw the destroyed rag dolls on top of the miserable child. Delbert burped loudly. Both walked out of her room with smirks on their faces, tiptoeing through the house as Marjorie continued to snore loudly, never knowing anyone had ever entered her house.

Emily waited for death to come. She thought she might have lain there, uncovered and bleeding for hours. She didn't know if she could move. She was cold. Her body had become a stone. It ached as the blood dried on her. Trying to move, the pain gripped her with a force that sucked her breath

away and she clutched her small body. Slowly, she swung her feet over her bed. With a will and determination and a show of strength worthy of great souls, Emily made her way to the small bathroom.

As she weakly edged her way in the darkness, Emily reached out in search of the shower. She climbed inside and shut the door turning the water on as hot as she could stand it on her bruised and ravaged skin. She stood under the steaming water as it burned her flesh.

Finally, tears fell and sobs escaped her mouth. She was an animal in a cage. Never had anything hurt so much. Emily crumpled to the shower stall floor and wailed. She vowed she would not tell anyone what had happened to her. But she vowed to herself she would get revenge and it would never happen to her again. Never.