

THE STORY BEHIND THE STORY

The Creation of Carrington

Elayne G. James



THE CREATION OF CARRINGTON

The Book That Almost Never Was

by

Elayne G. James

*The Story Behind the Story
of "The Saint of Carrington"*

AUTHOR'S NOTE

I wrote *The Creation of Carrington* to share with you not only the long and difficult, and sometimes unbelievable, road that this little book has taken on its three and a half decade journey to become a novel, but also to share some of my personal journey with you.

Carrington and I have been through a lot together. By sharing this history with you, I hope to, in some small way, convey just how much *The Saint of Carrington* means to me, and how it has helped me to heal, and taught me to live my life with courage and love.

It hasn't been an easy road for either one of us, but I can honestly say now, looking back, that it was all worth it.

There is beauty in the struggle, wisdom in the quest, transformation in the triumph. The gifts along the way are many if we keep our minds and hearts open to the possibilities.

Keep believing,

A handwritten signature in green ink that reads "Elaine G. James". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long, elegant tail on the final letter.



AN INNOCENT BEGINNING

The story of Carrington has been with me for a very long time. I've been working on it, in some form, quite literally all my adult life. And I know this tale of its evolution will seem a bit unbelievable at times, but I assure you, every word is true.

You may be surprised to learn how this story began. I was in my mid-20s, working in theatre as a Master Electrician, and talking with a group of friends on the stage crew about our various Christmas traditions. When we got on the subject of Santa Claus and Father Christmas, someone put a question to the group, "At what age did your parents tell you that Santa Claus didn't exist?"

When the question came around to me, I said, "My mom and dad never told me that he doesn't exist, so I never stopped believing in Santa Claus." They all laughed, of course, but it sparked an idea, which came in the form of a question...

What happens when people don't believe anymore? Does the magic die?

I went home that day and wrote for 2 hours on loose-leaf lined paper. First notes—word painting with the memories of my magical Christmases as a child and the wonder of the season, and then by the end, it became a short story about a family who'd suffered a great loss and an entire town that didn't believe in Santa Claus anymore. In time, through the transformational power of forgiveness, they learned to heal their hearts and start believing again—in the magic of Christmas, and in St. Nick.

Thirty-five handwritten pages later, The Saint of Carrington was born.

SIDE NOTE: Someone once asked me why I chose the name Carrington for the town. When I came to the naming of the town in that first, very rough draft, I wrote the words, 'Caring Town' as a place holder, but then, by the end, I had grown to like the sound of it, so instead of replacing it, I decided to merge it into one word.

When I wrote that little story, penned frantically in a single sitting, I had no idea what it would become, and that it would be evolving for the rest of my life.

Carrington enchanted me from the start. I knew almost instantly I had something that needed to be treated with care and respect. After talking it over with my roommate, Daniel Gordon, a theatrical lighting designer, I decided not to publish it as a short story, because if I did, it might stay a short story, and both Daniel and I felt somehow it had a bigger destiny. So I filed it away under "someday," and thought no more of it as life, college, and career took over.

A year or so later, Daniel and I started a lighting company called Infinity Arts, and thus began my 24 year career as a theatrical lighting designer.

It was at this time that I started turning Carrington into a stage play, because I was not only working in theatre, I was also writing for theatre. But Carrington never saw the light of day as a one-act play.

The year I turned 30, my first full-length theatrical musical, *Fool of Hearts*, was produced by Daniel Gordon & Dena Paponis on a USC stage, and I was hooked! What an amazing experience. My music partner at the time, Russell Taylor, and I had been working on it for five years. To see it come to life right before our eyes was one of the most rewarding and inspiring events of my life. Fool of Hearts took five years to complete, and it was a labor of love all the way.

SIDE NOTE: Fool of Hearts went on to a successful 5 week run in West Hollywood at The Globe Theater in the year 2000. Russell and I wrote and recorded over 60 songs together in our 10 years as partners. You can hear some of those songs on my blog at ElayneJamesBlog.com.

ON THE WINGS OF MUSIC

By my mid-30s I had met film composer James D. Peterson, who also was charmed by Carrington, and we began to convert it into a musical. This is where the story of Carrington really takes flight.

Being a songwriter, I had already written several songs for Carrington, because I continued to be inspired by the story in many ways. But until I met James D. Peterson, I never thought I had the talent or expertise to pull off a full-scale musical version of The Saint of Carrington.

I just wrote the songs, but James brought them to life with his inspiring orchestrations, and as we began collaborating on additional songs, the story took shape in a way that it never had before, indeed a way it never could have without music. It was magical.

After the musical was successfully workshopped (full cast, no sets, small black box theatre), and I had finally gotten to hear the songs sung semi-professionally, and see it "on its feet" in front of a live audience for the first time, things changed for me. Carrington became real. At the end, I joined the cast on stage and we did a lengthy Q&A with the audience (the best part of workshopping, in my opinion).

The audience response was overwhelmingly positive, and that had a powerful impact on me.

My favorite comments came from the children, who were thoroughly convinced that I, being the official chronicler of this enchanting piece of history, personally knew Santa Claus and could therefore answer all manner of questions that they had been dying to ask for years.

Some of these questions were very challenging, much more so than any of the comments that came from the adult members of the audience. Things like, "Since you know all this stuff about Santa, you must be in touch with him. Do you talk to him a lot? Can you get a message to him for me?" And, "If Santa lives in Switzerland, does that mean he hasn't gotten any of my letters?" And, "Does Santa really come down the chimney, because we don't have a fireplace." And, "Is it too late to change my wish?"

After those last few, I added lines in the story to put kids' minds at ease. But my personal favorite was, "Are you related to Santa? Because how else would you know all his secrets?"

I also received some great suggestions from the adults during the discussion that helped me refine the plot and characters. But I will never forget one elderly gentleman who sat long in his chair and waited—waited after the performance, after the meet-and-greet at the end, after everyone else had filtered through with congrats and thanks—so that he could speak with me privately.

The elderly gentleman had said nothing during the post-performance forum and was the only adult audience member to return the feedback card with nothing on it. He finally made eye contact with me as I was picking up the actors' scripts and putting chairs away. He hobbled up to me in slow motion, took my hands into his and said with a little twinkle in his eye, "Marvelous. Just marvelous! You even made *me* believe in Santa Claus, and I'm Jewish!"

It was in that moment I knew Carrington was something truly special. I knew I had to find a way to share it with the world. What I didn't know was just how many years it would take, and how many things would go wrong along the way.

That night, we went home and read the feedback cards we had given to everyone in the audience to fill out for anonymous, and therefore honest, comments. This is often where a writer gets the real pulse of the work and its impact on an audience. It is, at times, a scary process, for you never really know how you did until you read the cards.

SIDE NOTE: It is the same when a reader leaves a review for one of my books on Amazon or Barnes & Noble. I mentally 'hold my breath' until the reviews start coming in. They are such a vital part in the evolution of a book (they've even influenced my writing in future books). So when you enjoy a book, leave a review whenever possible. It makes all the difference to book and author!

With Carrington, the responses were so warm, positive, and supportive, that they brought tears to my eyes. Seriously. I was flooded. Things like, "I only wish there were more performances. I'd come see every one of them!" And, "This was the perfect way to start my holiday season. You got me in the spirit and that's not an easy thing to do!" And, "Please let me know the instant it becomes a full-scale production so I can buy tickets to bring my entire family!" But my favorite comment card consisted of only five words; "I'm a fan for life!"

Inspired by the success of the workshop, I decided to begin the submission process to see if I could get the musical picked up for a full-scale production. With the help of producer friend, Dena Paponis, who believed in Carrington as much as I did, I put together an impressive and comprehensive presentation packet to send to theatres that were known to produce original works.

The packet included the 'book' (which is what people in the biz call the script of a musical); casting sheet and character breakdown; a CD of the songs with James' orchestrations, including his beautiful overture and entr'acte; samples of costume and set design ideas; comments from workshop audience members; a reproduction of a section of James' impressive hand-notated orchestral score; and an assortment of promotional posters and ads ready for use.

First, we sent the Carrington package out to major theatres in the US who had mounted original musicals in recent years, and then to smaller theatres with a reputation for taking chances on new material.

The responses were positive straight across the board, but none could afford to take a risk on a Christmas musical that no one had ever heard of. The cost of doing a brand new production would be prohibitive when compared to the cost

of mounting a musical that already had a set and costumes that could be rented, and an audience they knew would show up.

Bottom line: The "classics" like *The Nutcracker* and *A Christmas Carol* make money year after year, and theatres depend on the success of their Christmas season to fund their other, less successful works performed throughout the rest of the year. My thought: *Okay, so I need to turn Carrington into a classic. How long does that take?*

After dozens of flattering rejections, the verdict was in. Carrington was just too big of a risk. It had taken 3 years to complete the musical and only 3 months to drown it in rejection letters.

By this time I was in my late 30s. I had invested too much time, love, and energy into Carrington to 'give up the ghost' (pun intended). So I decided to add some additional incentives to the package, and went to work designing a modular multipurpose set that could work for both large and small stages—one that would be easier and cheaper to build.

I also partnered with a talented costumer friend who believed in Carrington so much that she offered to make *all* the costumes on spec, in exchange for a cut of the profits if a theatre company were to pick it up.

And I offered to entirely wave my upfront fee, as well as my share of the profits to help pay for the expense of mounting a new musical. I tried every way I could to make it easier for theatre companies to say yes, but to no avail.

As a result, I began to consider turning Carrington into a novel. A few of the theatres I approached to produce the show even suggested it, (albeit unintentionally), saying, "If

you had written the musical based on a famous book, we could use that to bring audiences in, but..."

For the next few years I continued to send the Carrington theatre package out whenever I found a promising situation, but always got the same basic response... we love it, but we can't afford to produce it.

It was then that The Saint of Carrington caught the attention of a Hollywood producer. And thus began a new era for Carrington... one that would prove very challenging.

THE DANGER OF INNOCENCE

At first, it was new and exciting. I had the privilege of working with a talented professional set and costume designer, whose sketches brought the town and its characters into living color. My story was coming to life in a brand new way right before my eyes. It was a dream come true. But, unfortunately, there was a scorpion in the mix. One that would soon deliver a near-fatal sting.

The day of the first read-through with the cast and production team, the producer and I had a conversation that changed everything. A few minutes before we were to begin the read-through, he took me aside and calmly informed me that he now owned Carrington and planned to take my name off of the script and put his name in its place.

He said once he declared Carrington as his own work, the world would never believe me if I ever claimed to be its creator, and that if I ever tried he would sue me.

I was so stunned by this conversation that I was literally speechless (possibly for the first time in my life). We had been working closely on the project for many months by then and he was never anything but gracious and enthusiastic. Many times he'd thanked me for writing *The Saint of Carrington*, saying it had touched his heart in a way that nothing else could. He had acquired a set and costume designer and we were officially in the pre-production phase.

His words struck me like lightning. I couldn't move. I couldn't breathe. A thousand thoughts raced through my mind, starting with, *Could this really be happening?* And ending with, *Why have I never taken the time to get a proper US copyright?*

Here I was, a girl who believed in the magic of Christmas, and the innate goodness in people, who had even written *The Saint of Carrington* as a testament to that belief, and suddenly I had come face to face with the polar opposite of my ideals . . . a true villain. I had met my own "Simon Klaus," and he was trying to take Christmas away from me!

I knew he had the power and the means to take *Carrington* from me, and I possessed neither to protect it. My heart sank. It was like losing one of my children. Inside I was devastated, but on the outside, I acted as if nothing had happened. Instinct, I guess. I just turned away from him without saying a word.

I had to go through with the reading despite my scrambled thoughts and emotions. It was the professional thing to do. Walking out at that moment, I thought, would render more damage to my career than I was willing to risk at that time in my life. I had written other screenplays, and was currently working with other producers, so there was more at stake here than a single production.

There were other reasons I needed to go through with the reading—personal reasons. I'd been looking forward to this for a very long time. It had been a dream of mine to see Carrington made into a film and up until a second ago, that dream was coming true. I had spent nearly every day of the last few months preparing for this moment, (I had also spent the entire morning at Kinko's making copies of the script). And there were a dozen or so professional actors sitting around a stately conference table, all staring at me, waiting for me to begin Carrington's first Hollywood read-through.

So I did the only thing I could do. I smiled, thanked them all for coming, and handed out copies of the script.

I sat at the head of the table, trying to appear calm and act as if everything was normal while my stomach was in knots. I was visibly shaking and prayed no one would notice.

Then something magical happened.

A GIFT FROM ABOVE

It was brilliant hearing professional actors read Carrington. I got chills listening to them. I could tell they were enjoying themselves, but I couldn't keep my mind on the task at hand, for the battle ahead now loomed like a massive dark storm on the horizon.

Throughout the reading, I kept looking at the producer, as he followed along in the script while the actors read. He

held Carrington in his hands too tightly, as if to convey that he would never let it go.

But I guess angels were looking out for me (and for Carrington!) that day, because when the entire table turned to the last scene in the script, there was a blank page. As a matter fact, there were 15 blank pages. The entire last scene had simply vanished--not only in the actors' scripts, but in the producer's script as well!

Okay, I know this doesn't sound like a miracle just yet, but stick with me here.

I had used Kinkos' copy services hundreds of times prior to that day and never had anything like this happen. It wasn't a faint copy as if the ink was running out, the pages of the last scene were literally completely blank. But I had checked the scripts myself before I paid for the Xeroxing (I am always meticulous about copies being correct). ALL the scripts were clean and complete when I left Kinkos and headed for Hollywood.

Now, with the reading abruptly halted, I turned to the last scene in my own copy. The Master copy in my hands, the one I had made all the other copies from, was the only version that included the last scene! I quickly closed my script and slipped it into my bag, then apologized profusely, genuinely baffled as to how it happened. I was truly embarrassed by the incident, and quite confused. I collected all the copies at the table, and told everyone that I would make sure the script was complete the next time we had a reading.

As I drove home from Hollywood that day, going over the entire event in my mind, a broad smile spread across my face. It suddenly occurred to me that I had just left Hollywood with quite literally every copy of The Saint of

Carrington that existed in the entire world, *including* the producer's only copy.

I had chills all over as I realized what it meant. The scorpion no longer had tangible proof that Carrington even existed. It would now be quite difficult for him to make good on his threat. The instant I got home I received a call from him. He had all kinds of "good news" to report, and that I was to send him a complete copy immediately, so that he could show it to Hollywood directors and investors, blah, blah, blah.

Again I played it cool. I let him know that I would be in touch. He called me every day, sometimes several times a day, for the next few weeks, leaving messages with increasing animosity that turned into outright threats by the end of the month. I never called him back.

I decided to contact Gordon Firemark, a lawyer friend I'd worked with in the theatre. I was determined to fight for Carrington. It was mine and always would be. It came from somewhere deep inside me, and would never belong to anyone else. Gordon said the best weapon I had for fighting this scorpion was Carrington's long history.

Because I had workshopped the musical the year before, there were at least 25 actors and production team folk who could and would testify that Carrington was my creation. I was prepared to gather these people and do battle, but it never came to that. All it took was a well-written, pro bono, legal-threat-letter from Gordon Firemark, and I never heard another word from the scorpion.

I could finally breathe again. Carrington and I have had many angels looking out for us over the years, and Gordon Firemark was one of the first!

For a while, The Saint of Carrington lay dormant, gathering dust on a shelf, as I healed from the scorpion's sting. And though I got over it, his attempts to take Carrington away from me would have future repercussions.

It would be a few more years before I was willing to risk exposure again. But Carrington has always refused to stay hidden or silent for long.

In my early 40s I met a woman producing an entire season at a beautiful Art Deco proscenium theater in LA County. She wanted a new original musical for the final show of the season, which ended in December. As she said this, I swear I saw dark clouds part to let a ray of sunshine through! I told her, over lunch, the story of Carrington, and she was enchanted.

Within a few weeks, I had given her the musical to read and listen to, and she had booked it as the grand finale of the season. A month later she gave me a poster and a T-shirt with Carrington listed as the world premiere finale. It was finally returning to the stage where it belonged. I was so excited, but had to wait eight months for it to happen.

Six and a half months later, as we were starting to cast the musical, I was notified that the show had been canceled. I couldn't believe it. They said the producer took a political stand with the theatre's Board of Directors and was fired. They pulled the rest of her season and Carrington was once again shelved before ever seeing the light of day (I still have the t-shirt to prove it).

At this point I began to wonder why this sweet little Christmas story met with so many obstacles. It seemed somehow cursed. Whatever the reason, it was something I had no control over, so for a while, I gave in to it. I had to just accept the fact that, as strange as it sounds, Carrington

has a magic of its own, and a mischievous spirit. It would make its own way regardless of where I wanted it to go.

So I turned to other stories. I began to write *The LightBridge Legacy*, which was to become my first published novel, and my first series. By my mid-40s I was completely immersed in the world of my fictional character Ani Jasper, consciously and subconsciously.

I was dreaming about it nightly. I would wake and write notes in a frenzy, almost as if I were taking dictation and couldn't keep up. I, like Ani, had been drawn into another realm. It was a new magic for me. It felt like falling in love. I couldn't wait to get back to the page, to live another day in Ani's amazing fictional universe.

SIDE NOTE: An interviewer once asked me the question, "Why do you write?" and I said, "To find out what happens!" That's how it's always been for me. When I write, I feel like I'm reading a great book that I just can't put down. The only difference is that the words aren't there until I put them there.

SIDE NOTE: It took me 7 years to complete the 900-page novel *The LightBridge Legacy*, and another 7 years to see it published (by then it had been divided up into a series of 4 books). At the time of this writing only book one, *The Secret Half*, is out. I am looking forward to returning to complete the series, now that *Carrington* has been released.

Although my focus was on *The LightBridge Legacy*, my thoughts would always turn toward *Carrington* every year around Christmastime. I knew in my heart I would return to it someday, and when I did, I knew I would be turning it into a novel. *Carrington* wasn't gone, just in a 'magical hibernation' like Santa's reindeer, waiting to be reawakened.

In my early 50s, I found myself drawn back to Carrington periodically. I started the conversion from musical to novel several times, but never finished. Never even got half way. The songs are what stopped me. It seemed a near impossible task to put into prose what I had done in song. In a song, a writer can say what she could never convey in mere words. It's magic is undeniable, ineffable. And by trying, it was almost as if I was betraying the heart of the story by removing the musicality.

There was no denying it. The soul of Carrington was in its music. So when I began adapting it into a novel, the musician in me resisted. Deep inside I think I was afraid I would let Carrington down, that I would fail to transmute the magic and it would end up being a listless and uninteresting book. It just seemed too daunting of an undertaking. My attempts dwindled and I began to think it would never become a novel.

And then something magical happened again.

I met the one person who was to help me bring my stories to the world for many years to come, Cat Spydell (World Nouveau Books).

We met and got to know each other through our writing in a local writer's workshop. The first thing I noticed was Cat's unusual style of interaction with the other writers. While we read our requisite 10 pages, she never looked up from her notebook. I assumed she was taking notes, but when I glimpsed what she had been so preoccupied with, I saw that it wasn't notes, but doodles. She had been doodling the entire time. At first I thought she was simply bored and ignoring us, that is until she offered her critique. Constructive. Insightful. Even profound at times. I learned she was a unique and powerful editor. When I finally asked

her about the doodling, which, by the way, was very colorful and beautiful, she said, "It helps me think."

BREATHING NEW LIFE INTO CARRINGTON

Years later, after the first book in The LightBridge Series had been published, World Nouveau was doing one of their monthly book signings at Borders Books, which Borders called "Mischievous Muse Day."

SIDE NOTE: Want to know a secret? Ever since my books have been published on World Nouveau's imprint, Mischievous Muse Press, I have found a way to work the word 'mischievous' into all my books . . . including Carrington. ッ

While at the Borders book signing, I had an impromptu chat with the manager of the store, Pete Ledesma. This particular signing was during the month of December, and he asked me if I had any Christmas books in the works. I told him I had a story that had been with me a very long time, but I had not yet made it into a book.

"What's it about?" he asked.

I spent the next 5 minutes telling him all about The Saint of Carrington. Pete's face lit up. Right then and there he made me promise to make Carrington into a novel and have it ready for him by next Christmas. He said he would have no trouble selling 100+ copies a day during the holidays.

I returned to the project with renewed enthusiasm.

But months later, I was still struggling with it. The same problem arose every time I worked on it—how to weave the essential essence of the songs into the story without losing their magic and the deep insight they provide into the characters.

A few months later, during one of my publisher meetings with Cat Spydell, I voiced my frustrations about Carrington and she asked to read the musical. I told her that reading it would not do it justice, that she had to *hear* it as well.

I handed her the book, (script), and as she read it, I followed along. Whenever she reached a place where the actors sang, we stopped and I played the CD so that she could hear the song and read the lyrics along with it. It took a few hours to get through the entire musical this way, but when we were done, she looked at me and said 'this is wonderful. I can't believe you have been sitting on this all these years!'

Then I told her the long and bumpy road that Carrington had taken in the last 3 decades, and related the challenges of converting it into novel form.

I said I had no idea how to preserve the magic inherent in the musical version. It wasn't as if I could put lyrics in the novel and have readers stop and listen to the songs as they went through the book.

After much discussion, we decided that I was just too close to the project to see a way through. So Cat became my next angel, saving Carrington not from a scorpion, but from an equally threatening foe . . . the dusty shelf.

Having been not only an author, editor, and publisher, but also a producer who adapted children's classics into Ice Capades-style shows, she offered to take the musical and convert it into a manuscript. I said yes, with great relief. It

was like I'd been trying to climb a mountain for years, and someone had just offered me a gondola ride up to the top.

In truth, I doubt Carrington would've ever become a novel if it hadn't been for Cat Spydell. I believe without Cat's initial conversion, I might have continued my attempts to turn Carrington into a novel, but I don't know that I would have ever succeeded in getting over my dread of losing the magic that the music provided.

But that wasn't the end of it. It would be another five years before Carrington would become the novel it was meant to be.

The first time I read through the rough draft that Cat provided only a month after agreeing to convert it, I felt a sinking feeling that something was missing. For me, the magic was gone.

My hopes dashed, I began to feel a hopelessness creep in. I thought that because of Cat's involvement, I wouldn't have to climb that mountain, but that was not the case. For me, the one thing vital to the very heart of the story—the depth and insight into the character's lives provided by the music—just hadn't translated to the page.

She had done a fine job of converting the words from musical to manuscript, adding in some delightful bits of description along the way, but she seemed to have skipped over the songs entirely, as if they were incidental to the story rather than the heart of it.

I had envisioned all my problems being solved when I agreed to partner on the manuscript, but I should have known better. It was my mountain to climb, and no one else's. I had to rise to the challenge, not circumvent it by giving it to someone else. Carrington would demand nothing less of me.

I needed to rediscover the heart of the story and develop the characters and back-stories that, at that moment, lacked depth, vitality, and the original spark of magic that the music had brought to the story.

Cat disagreed. She was excited at the prospect of World Nouveau publishing a Christmas book, and felt Carrington should remain simple, lighthearted, and short. She wanted it to be a children's book, because it would be easier to sell, and she was right, of course, it would be much easier to market a fun little kid's book at Christmas.

But this story was never meant to be solely for children. I wrote Carrington for people of all ages, but more than that, I wrote it for those who have lost their way, lost their faith, or lost loved ones dear to them and are facing Christmas without them. I wanted Carrington to help heal the hearts of those who struggle at Christmastime. In my mind, it wasn't a simple children's story at all, and never would be.

The conflict resulting in the disagreement between Cat and I about what Carrington should ultimately be, opened old wounds for me—wounds that were the

direct result of others in the past trying to own or control Carrington's destiny. I had the sinking feeling that it was 'happening all over again'.

It was a gut reaction, of course. In my head I knew it wasn't the same this time around. Cat cared about Carrington and cared about me, but it triggered old fears nonetheless.

Cat and I had partnered on many projects before (and since), and had no problem splitting everything down the middle, including the decision making process. When there was a disagreement, it simply meant we needed to keep

working on the problem until we came to some kind of compromise.

But something in me wouldn't allow me to compromise with Carrington. It needed to be what it needed to be. And though, at the time, I didn't know what that was, I knew it wasn't what Cat had done.

Looking through the fog of old wounds, I realized I was not able to see the situation clearly, so I decided to consult my *wise counsel*. I am blessed to have a few beautiful souls in my life whose wisdom I cherish, like my sweetheart (he loves Carrington almost as much as I do), my 3 wise sisters (one older, and two younger, all extraordinary women), and my sagacious father, (my mum too was a part of my wise counsel, when she walked the earth), all of whom provide perspective, clarity, loving feedback, and sound advice. And most importantly, they let me know when I'm wrong.

When I explained the situation with Carrington, however, the response was unanimous. They all agreed I had been through too much with Carrington to give up control, but I didn't know how to ask Cat to release her interests in Carrington, and I feared that meant another battle loomed on the horizon—one I was not prepared to wage.

I felt that no matter the outcome, I would lose. I would either lose Carrington or I would lose my friend (and publisher!). It just wasn't worth it. Of course, I realize now, that this may not have been the most realistic assessment of the situation, but that's how it seemed at the time.

I felt the fight go out of me. Maybe 'Carrington the novel' just wasn't meant to be.

So I put it back on that dusty shelf, and there it sat for another year. But in that year, it loomed just beyond my thoughts, calling me back, like a haunting echo.

I didn't answer the call. It seemed like a vivid dream I once had, a dream that changed me in unexpected ways, and would stay with me for the rest of my days. Still, it was just a dream.

THE DEPTHS OF HEALING

A year went by—a year without writing—before yet another phase in the life of Carrington would begin.

Christmas came again, as it always does, extending a gentle hand of hope, inviting us to believe again, and with Christmas, for me, comes thoughts of Carrington.

I was still humbled by the task, but after re-reading Cat's rough-draft, and feeling, innately, what needed to be done, I finally felt up to the challenge of beginning the rewrite.

One more shot, I thought. If it doesn't work out this time, I'll call it a day and move on. After all, I have MANY other stories waiting in the wings for me to write, AND an entire series to finish!

SIDE NOTE: By this time, The Lightbridge Legacy had been on hold far too long, and I feared the fans of the first book might have given up on ever seeing the second book, let alone the third and forth. But, despite appearances, I never forgot about Ani, CJ and Kahetay and their journey to Azimara. I'd been taking notes the entire time as new ideas came through, and continue to do so even now. Adventure awaits!

A lot had changed in the past few years for me. I had lost two family members within 6 months of each other and spent most of the year in a cycle of grief and healing, during which time I wrote only in my journal, not stories,

but thoughts and feelings to help me process what I was going through and to begin to understand death as a part of life. Coming out of it, I found I was a little older, a little wiser and a lot braver than I had been when the Carrington journey began.

I wanted to waste no more time on the logistical details. Life was just too short. What really mattered now was finishing Carrington and getting it out there.

So I dusted off the Carrington manuscript yet again. I still didn't know exactly how to add the essential essence of the songs and the magic they held, but I somehow knew I would find that elusive golden thread if I moved forward with faith. Doubt and fear dissolved. I became certain that the answer would come right when I needed it as long as I had the courage to begin. I was starting to believe in the magic of Christmas again!

What I didn't know was how it would change me.

Before continuing with Carrington's evolution, I would like to take you back to one of the pivotal moments in my life, because this is where and when the seed was planted for my eventual breakthrough with the story. It also happens to be one of the worst days of my life.

It was just before Christmas, 2008. I was facing Christmas alone that year, with my family far away and scattered to the four winds.

One quiet evening, I settled in to watch a beautiful children's film about a little girl who lost her mother and in her grief and devastation, lost herself, her faith, and her place in the world. But eventually, she found a way to heal and embrace life again by turning her attention to new life.

The movie begins with the powerful and tragic scene of the aftermath of her mother's fatal car crash, which is revealed in broad dark strokes without a speck of production sound. Instead, a beautiful, heart-wrenching song plays throughout the scene. As I listened to this song, my eyes filled with tears, and I began to sob. I knew, in that instant, that my mother had died.

I was still crying when my sister called with the news, not 20 minutes later. "Mom's gone. Dad was with her. She didn't suffer."

During this devastating phone call there came a knock at the door. I opened the door and a stranger asked my name, handed me a piece of paper, and then said "You've been served."

I said "Are you effing kidding me?" and then slammed the door in his face.

You see, I had been in my own near-fatal car crash the year before—had been through 6 months of rehabilitation—and was now apparently being sued by the other driver. I could not fathom the timing of that moment.

However alone I felt before in that moment paled in comparison to how alone I felt now. The beautiful, wise, courageous woman who had raised me was not only my mother, but also my best friend for most of my adult life.

As I faced the holidays with immense grief and overwhelming loss, I truly felt, deep inside, that Christmas would never be the same. It seemed to my grief-stricken heart that every year when Christmastime came, I would feel the loss of my mum all over again.

It took me a long time to heal. And throughout most of that time I felt her with me . . . here and there, throughout my day, whenever grief overtook me. It came in waves when I least expected it and pulled me under as swift as an undertow. All at once, I'd feel like I was drowning. Couldn't breathe. Couldn't think. Couldn't see through the tears. But she was always there at those times, standing with me, pulling me from the clutches of the emotional undercurrents, and staying with me until I could breathe again. It was an undeniably visceral feeling, her presence. There was no doubt in my mind that she was here, helping me through, helping me heal.

SIDE NOTE: I had come to believe in an afterlife by then, but I'd never had proof of it before. This 'visceral feeling' is where Garrett Hillerman's ghostly scenes came from in the final version of the book. I was only able to write Garrett in as a main character after having the experience myself. And I couldn't give Nora's grief the depth that it deserved until I had gone to those depths myself.

My mum always loved *The Saint of Carrington*. It was her favorite work of mine, and she had read and loved everything I'd ever written, as only a mother can.

At the time of her death, *Carrington* was not yet a novel, but it was a theatrical musical. She adored the music, the characters, the story, the messages of hope and healing, and the lesson that there is power and grace in the act of forgiveness and letting go.

In one of the last conversations I was to have with her, she made me promise to adapt *Carrington* into a novel. I made that promise even though, at the time, I was baffled as to how I would accomplish it.

Like my characters, like the girl in the movie I watched that horrible night, I needed to find a way back to Life, back to embracing the future, back to believing in Christmas.

Nearly a decade later, during my 'year without writing' I lost my older brother to a sudden and inexplicable death. Grant was a wizard on the keys and a gifted sax player. His death sent shockwaves through the musical community where he lived, and it did the same to my heart. He was only a year older than me and we had been inseparable as children. He was also my very first musical partner. After I had taken the time to process this loss, it would finally bring to light the need to heal the last remaining strands of grief over the loss of my mother as well.

This, I did through the writing of Carrington. It was my journey back . . . a journey of healing, of acceptance, of embracing life, and restoring the wonder of the season to my grateful heart.

I think maybe this is what Carrington was waiting for all along. It wasn't ready to be completed until I was ready to heal . . . and in turn, help others to heal.

Now, it was as if I was standing at the top of that mountain, realizing I had three more mountains to climb, but this time I was ready. Instead of being daunted by the task, I felt inspired by it. So finally, I began working on Carrington again . . . on what I thought would be the final version. Silly me.

It took another year of writing and healing, healing and writing, before I felt it was ready to go to an editor.

And then something magical happened yet again!

ON THE SHOULDERS OF GIANTS

Standing in a bookstore, I casually picked up a writer magazine, turned to a random page, and saw a tiny announcement at the bottom. It said that the UK editors, Jefferson Franklin, were taking on new clients and I somehow knew they were the ones. I didn't look for testimonials from other writers (as I would normally do), I didn't check out their website, I didn't care what they had done in the past, I just knew they were the editors for Carrington.

I sent them the first three chapters and they sent me a sample edit in return. It was, as the Brits say, 'bloody brilliant!' I knew instantly, that they were challenging me to 'step up my game' and make Carrington what it was meant to be.

They felt as I did, that if Carrington was to become "the classic it aspires to be," as they put it, I would have to dive deeper into the characters' depths.

Jefferson Franklin's edits, corrections, comments and recommendations represented a whole new level of writing for me, which was at once, exciting and frightening.

Since I was the proverbial "starving artist" at the time, their fee would prove to be a challenge for me as well. But The Saint of Carrington had taken so long to get to where it was, and had been through so many versions, that I knew I needed an impartial critique at this point in its evolution. I needed an editing team that understood what I was trying to accomplish and cared about the end result. Jefferson Franklin were those editors for me. The sample edit they provided made that abundantly clear.

So I hired them as Carrington's final editors. When I received their notes and comments for the entire manuscript, I didn't get to work straight away. In fact, it took a month or two just to absorb the extent, depth, and meaning of their comments, *and* muster the courage required to resolve the issues they had revealed (I even had to consult the dictionary a few times just to figure out what they were saying). They challenged me in new and unexpected ways, to make Carrington as good as it could possibly be, and in order to do that, I had to become a better writer.

It was clear through their comments that they thought Carrington could become something special if I could become the writer they were challenging me to be. And best of all, they had never heard or seen the musical. I never told them Carrington's origin story.

They knew nothing of my struggles to hold onto the magic of the songs, so the fact that they thought the book had potential gave me strength.

It took another full year's worth of rewrites and then a round of beta readers (which added another six months to the process) for the book to become what it is today, doubled in breadth and depth since that first draft conversion.

I spent an additional 4 months on fact-checking to make sure every detail was true to the era. All the meals in The Grand Dining room were taken from actual hotel menus from 1899. The attire in every character's wardrobe was made up of era-specific materials and fashions. The travel times on steam ocean liners had been double-checked. The toys in Santa's Workshop were all from the 1800s. I researched the use of electricity, industrial machinery, conveyances, building materials . . . on and on. I did extensive research on turn-of-the-century language, in English and various other languages (did you know that the word "Wow" goes all the way back to

the 1600s?). I wanted every possible detail to speak of the time. But I forgot about the moon!

The magic of Carrington afoot...

On the final proofing of the book before publication, I was reading through the last scene and realized I had written that the moon was full on Christmas Eve as Nicholas and William take off into the night to deliver gifts the world over. *Oh no*, I thought, *was the moon actually full on Christmas Eve in 1899?* I never checked. I knew the chances were slim, and I knew I would leave it full in the last scene regardless of the facts, but I had to know.

I held my breath as I looked it up on the internet. I found a site that listed every full moon for the last 200 years. When I found 1899, tingles shot through me. The moon turned full on Dec. 22nd 1899. I did a quick Google search and asked, "How long does the full moon last?" and Google said, "While a **full moon** is only a moment's time, it looks to the human eye to **last** a length of about four days." Perfect! Carrington's Christmas Eve moon was legit.

While Carrington's path out in the world has been fraught with problems, the writing of Carrington has been filled with magical moments. The moon was just one example. If I were to name them all, this document would be far too long. Suffice to say, I have felt blessed every step of the way, even when I struggle to find the path. I feel honored to be Carrington's author and am so grateful for all the inspiration provided me.

SIDE NOTE: At the time of the first writing and throughout the early years of Carrington's development, I was an atheist (feels strange to say it, since I can't even imagine living my life as an atheist now). No one was more surprised than I, that I had written a story which included the afterlife of souls and an account of Jesus' birth

as back-story, not to mention God's existence as a precept. But like C. S. Lewis (and partly *because* of C. S. Lewis), I eventually found my way to Faith, and when I did, *The Saint of Carrington* took on a whole new meaning for me. It was as if a part of me knew who I would become long before I arrived. In retrospect, Carrington seemed to be waiting for me to walk the path to God before I could truly be finished with the story.

PASSION • VISION • INSPIRATION • HEART

I can honestly say, *The Saint of Carrington* would have never been published without the help of so many amazing people (and angels) along the way—James Peterson for partnering with me in creating the musical and helping me develop the true heart of Carrington; my entertainment lawyer, Gordon Firemark for saving Carrington from the scorpion; my friend and CPA, Bob Dworkin, for keeping my head above water as I ignored the practical to focus on the fictional; Tony Fyler and his team at Jefferson Franklyn, who helped transform Carrington into an "aspiring classic"—especially Darren for his superb sample edit (which rocked my world) and Anthony for his great work on the entire manuscript.

SIDE NOTE: Look for "nods" to favorite Christmas Classics throughout the book!

A very special thanks goes to Russell Taylor, for his in-depth story critique of the musical, which ultimately shaped the book, and for suggesting I make one small but crucial change to the title.

My heartfelt thanks to my beta readers: Ishara, Raena, and Michelle (my three wise sisters), Jim, Liz, Noel, Greg, Cindy, and Ken, whose honest feedback has always given me the chance to make those final refinements and add the finishing touches that make a book ultimately more readable; and to my family,

for reading and celebrating everything I've ever written, and always cheering me on.

And, of course, to Cat Spydell for being Carrington's dedicated midwife; always looking out for us; and always making decisions in Carrington's best interest. For taking that first step, so that I could eventually find the courage to transform Carrington into what it needed to be; for being sympathetic to all that I went through with Carrington, *and* for bowing out gracefully when I panicked and went into hiding. But most importantly, for being a dear friend and a superb creative partner all these years, for always being enthusiastic about my stories, my art, and for believing in me as a person *and* as an author. Our partnership has always been filled with magic, incredible synchronicity, creativity, and faith in our path together. I should have known it would all turn out perfect! When it comes to us, it always does!

But most of all, to my sweetheart, Ken Henatay, for all the love, support, and encouragement through the years. Through rough seas and smooth sailing, he is always there, helping me to keep the faith. He has never let me forget who I am, and why I am here. He believes in me and he believes in my books. What a gift that is! Because writers waver. We don't always know that what we are doing has merit. But whenever I falter, Ken is always there to remind me that it's all worth it.

And without his support—keeping the roof over our heads and food on the table—I would never have been able to afford the time I have spent writing and editing Carrington (it has been pretty much a full-time job these last few years), nor would I have fared well without his wise counsel.

He is my first audience whenever I finish a book (or even just a chapter), and is always encouraging and excited about the result. It means everything to have someone who believes in

you, especially when you forget to believe in yourself. Ken Henatay is the guardian of my heart *and* my stories.



As I said in the letter to my readers at the back of the book, I hope that The Saint of Carrington has touched your heart as much as it has touched mine and my family's. And if perchance you have lost your way, lost your faith, or lost loved ones dear to you and are facing Christmas without them, it is my sincere wish that this message of hope will help to heal your hearts in some small way, and help you to believe again in the magic of Christmas and the miracle of love.

CARRINGTON AND THE GIFT OF GIVING

I am pleased to announce that one-third of all Carrington's profits will go to the Christmas charity, "Operation Santa," based out of the US Postal Service

Postal workers volunteer to open Santa's mail after hours and assign "elf duties" to individuals like you and me, who want to make a difference in an underprivileged child's life by making their Christmas wishes come true.

How it works: We elves are given a copy of a child's letter to Santa and assigned a number that corresponds to an address (that the post office keeps private). Then volunteer elves go out and purchase the gifts on the list (often they are practical items such as 'shoes in a size 4' or 'a warm hat & mittens' rather than toys). Once we have acquired the items, we wrap them and drop them off at the same post office so the postal workers can package them and send them to the child!

"Operation Santa" goes by different names in different states and not all US Post Office locations participate. I have posted a list of participating post offices on the Carrington website, and although it is a relatively small number, I am hoping to change that in the future by giving them additional funds to run the operation. And I will certainly be volunteering as an elf every year!

THE FUTURE OF CARRINGTON

❖ There is currently an illustrated version planned. I am very excited to work with an artist to bring some of the objects in the book to life: the Metachronome, the Clockwork Key, the ornaments on the tree, and Santa's sleigh just to name a few. This will be a special edition hard cover keepsake version.

❖ There are also plans to convert *The Saint of Carrington* into an audio book at some point and with it, we may include some of the songs from the musical in a bonus section!

❖ If all goes well with *The Saint of Carrington's* first edition, I have an outline for a sequel that'll follow William's ascension to becoming the next Santa. Plus I have a few novella ideas that will explore Kringle Towne and Carrington's bygone days. I would love to write about the Clockwork Key, the Metachronome and the machines Great Toymakers' Hall (to name a few)—how they were made and about the craftsmen who made them.

❖ I am hoping it can still be made into a film someday, by someone who cares deeply and will take care of this 'little-story-that-could'.

❖ And, of course, my dream is to see it return to the stage and finally have its shot at becoming the full-scale professional musical production it deserves to be.

And even when all these are done, intuition tells me that it will not be the end of it. I imagine *The Saint of Carrington* will always be evolving.

Thank you for coming along on this strange and wonderful journey, exploring the origins of Carrington. I truly appreciate you and the time you have invested in me and my books.

Email me! I would love to hear from you. Tell me your experience with Carrington, what it has meant to you, how it helped you through a hard time, or just say hi!

You can email me at ElayneJames@gmail.com.

And don't forget to follow my blog, *Rhythms of Thought* where I share my stories, thoughts, visions, dreams, ideas, and personal discoveries, as well as any wisdom I happen upon in my search for personal truth on the path of self-evolution. Basically it's about my adventures in being human.

If you would like to read more EGJ books, check out *The Secret Half*—Book One of The LightBridge Legacy series—about a young teen who has been chosen by a race of ancients to inherit the most powerful magical object in the world and her search for answers along the way. It is available on Amazon, Barnes and Noble and in bookstores worldwide.

I wish for you all the blessings of the season, and hope your holidays are filled with love, light, laughter, and, of course...

Magic!

Many heartfelt thanks,

Elayne G. James

Elayne G. James

PS: Don't forget to visit *The Saint of Carrington* on Amazon.com and leave a review! For quick access, scan the QR Code at the bottom of the next page!



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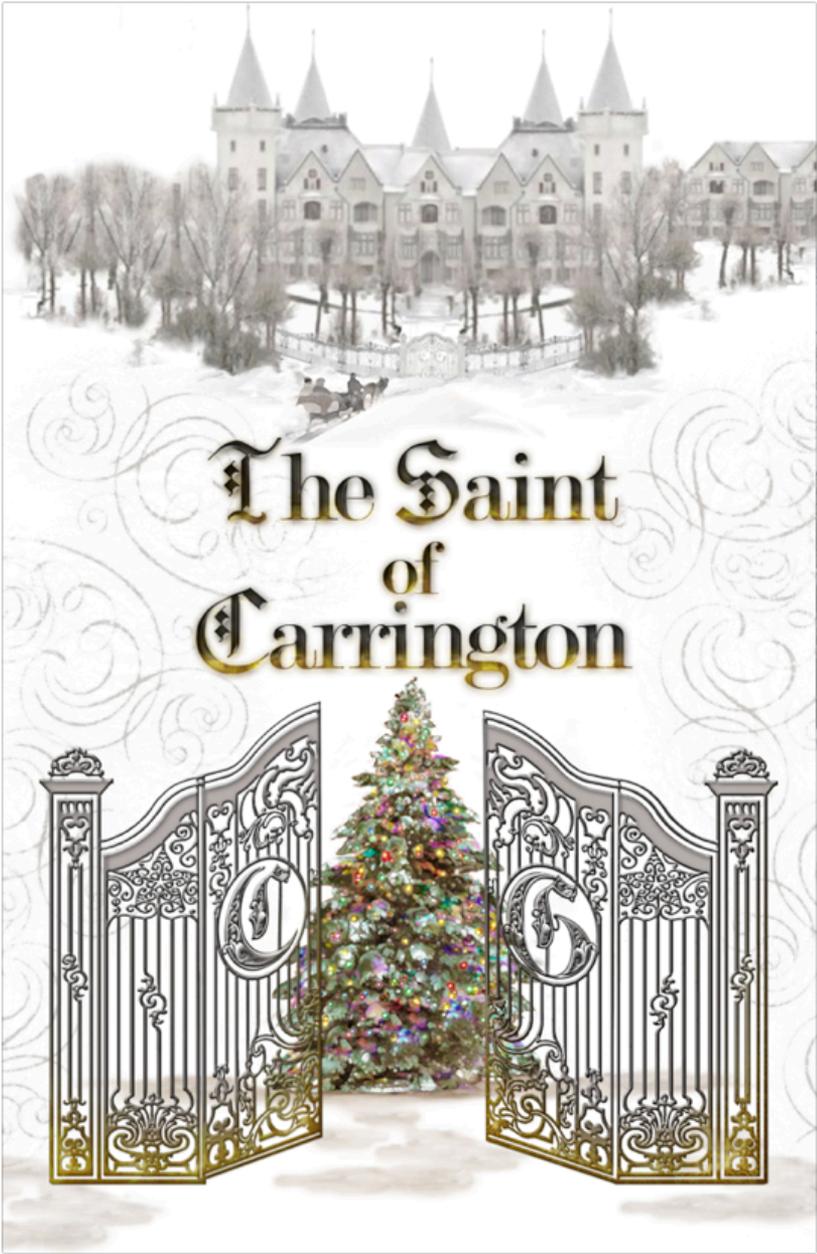
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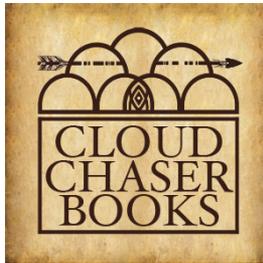
*Scribbler
of words on
paper napkins
in cafes.
Musician
by birth.
Explorer
of dreams,
myth, and
imagination.
Passionate
pursuer of
creative
expression.
Curious
surveyor of
unexplained
phenomena
and the
mysteries of
the universe.
Dyslexic
time-traveler.*

FUN FACTS ABOUT ELAYNE G. JAMES

- Born in Monterey, California, to musician parents whose supreme silliness, genius, creativity, and highly developed sense of fun proved infectious to their somewhat innocent children
- Spent her formative years on her family's small ranch learning the secret language of the animals and the enchantments of the land
- Became a musician and songwriter at an early age
- Traveled extensively throughout childhood and adolescence
- First became a writer by chronicling her family's adventures on the road
- Wrote her first book at the age of 11 (100 handwritten pages + a crayon cover)
- Fell in love with Jules Vern and H.G.Wells in her tween years
- Began penning sci-fi and fantasy stories in her teens but never admitted to it in polite company
- Became a playwright in college
- Took a right turn down a rabbit hole and wrote screenplays for seven years
- Started writing novels at the ripened-on-the-vine-age of 37
- Enjoys history, theoretical physics, & technology
- Possesses an uncommon affinity for antique clocks and compasses that no longer tell time or point North
- Still believes in Santa Claus



World Nouveau's Prelim Galley Cover © 2016



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