

LADY KILLER

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Words: Andrea Carlo Cappi

Most of you might know me by the name of J. Towers, though my real name is currently Catherine J. Torres. And I think you heard that name too, in the news. Yes: murder, organized crime, double cross, conspiracy, treason – high or low – I 've been through it all. You see, Justice is my middle name. You didn't know that, did you? You think I'm just a crazy young lady who kills people, don't you? Well, there's a lot of things you don't know about me. I hope I have your attention now. So I guess this is my best chance to tell you everything you need to learn, before you judge me.

I was born Catherine Justice Kirby in Los Angeles, 1932. My mother, Carolina Torres, came from the North American branch of a family of flamenco dancers from Spain. A would-be movie star, she went to Hollywood and only got a few small parts: she might have had a few more chances if she had gone to bed with the right guy, but she didn't. So, she finally got married and forgot both her flamenco and her dreams of the silver screen. Olé.

My father, Sam Kirby, was a writer with Globus Production. He worked mostly on serials, such as *The Chameleon*, *Revenge of the Chameleon* and *Eyes of the Chameleon*, featuring an amateur crimefighter who usually infiltrated evil secret organizations, disguising himself as one of the members in order to destroy them from the inside. Poor budget, great scripts.

During the war, the studios were ordered to make a few propaganda movies supporting our Russian allies. My father was hired to write *The Red Chameleon*, in which his usual hero worked for the Kremlin against a nazi spy ring in Europe. He didn't expect, a few years later, to be summoned by the House Unamerican Activities Committee – the witch-hunters – accused to be a communist. And not just a communist, but a Russian agent. He told them the request to write a pro-Soviet *Chameleon* movie came from Washington DC. He was

even able to show the Committee a letter from a senator Alexander Burns, in charge of propaganda during wartime. The senator denied having written such a letter and declared it a fake.

My father was no longer allowed to work in Hollywood and found himself under surveillance. He started a second career writing stories for this pulp magazine named *American Justice*, under the pen name J. Towers: the series was called *Miss Justice* and the main character was, actually, a female version of *The Chameleon*. Nobody ever knew that Sam Kirby and J. Towers were the same person, not even the publisher: I was the one who delivered the stories to the editor, claiming that my father was a wounded war hero, now on a wheelchair. As long as the stories were good, the editor didn't care. He kept paying the monthly check.

But the Committee inquisitor working on my father's case, Mr. Everett Garfield, wanted to make an example out of him. He went on digging. Till he discovered that my father's real name was Samuel Koenigsberg and one of his best friends at the high school was actually a distant relative of Soviet spies Julius and Ethel Rosenberg. That was the end of it: dad was framed as a member of the Russian spy ring which had stolen the plans for the bomb, and sentenced to death.

My father was not a spy, but there was nothing we could do to save him. I was 21 years old by then. After his death, the only way I could think of to support my mother and myself was following my father's step: I went on writing the *Miss Justice* stories under the usual pen name and sold them to *American Justice*. The editor never realized the author had changed. But I couldn't stop wondering why Mr. Garfield wanted to destroy my father. Well, I thought, what would *Miss Justice* do? She would investigate, wouldn't she? She would seek... Justice!



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And that's what I did.

My first move: I dyed my light brown hair blond. I assumed a new identity, «Justine Rock», would-be-starlet, and established my new persona by joining a model agency under my alias. I even got to a few magazine covers. Meanwhile, mostly in disguise, I started following Garfield. Then I went to a party I knew he'd go to,,, and seduced the sonofabitch. I won't get into details. I became his girlfriend. I listened to him a lot and pretended to share his political ideas. Right-wing would be an understatement. When I «confessed» my real name was Justine von Turm and that I had had to flee Berlin with my mother when the Russian arrived in 1945, he bought it. Finally I was invited to a secret reunion in a Hollywood villa, a meeting of what he called the California Fourth Reich: five influent men – two politicians, two top cops and Garfield himself, their HUAC man – plus a couple of wives. Since they thought Hollywood was the center of red propaganda, they had created a secret organization aiming

to take over the studios and use them to promote their own ideas. In their plans, soon the Nazis would no longer be the bad guys in the movies, but the heroes of a new world. Where, of course, there would be no place for non-Aryans.

I had to stop them.

But I couldn't do it alone, nor I could go to the FBI or the police. So I remembered a man my mother had told me about, the one she didn't go to bed with: a guy called Phil Sacco, who used to take care of the East Coast Mafia families' interests in the film business. Funny how everybody knew Sacco was in the Mob, but nobody did nothing about it. I approached him as «Justine Rocca» a.k.a. Justine Rock and told him I'd give him important information if he just gave me a Hollywood career in return. The bait: a dossier I «borrowed» from Garfield about a Mob boss called Mickey Goldberg, Sacco's boss. Actually, Garfield was not interested in Goldberg because he was a criminal, but only because he had a Jewish name and links

with the movie industry. I led Sacco to believe there was a secret alliance between politicians and law enforcers who planned to get the Mafia out of Hollywood. I let him know where and when their next meeting would be. That night, during the meeting at the villa, I told Garfield I needed to go out in the garden for some fresh air, I went to the gate and let the hit squad in. Then I placed an anonymous call to the police. The Mafia guys killed Garfield and the other Nazis, the police arrived in time to kill a few of the hit men and arrest the ones who survived the gunfight, including Sacco.

After that I couldn't stay in Los Angeles any longer. I had used aliases, but I couldn't afford the risk of being recognized by some of Saccos' associates. I convinced my mother we needed to leave town. We went to New York, where I returned to my natural hair colour and legally changed my name into Catherine J. Torres. I kept writing the Miss Justice series, sending the stories to the publisher by mail.

I hoped a whole new life in a new city could get my mother out of the depression she had fell into after my father's death, It didn't work. My mother's mind was still there in LA, at the trial, still punishing herself for being alive. She blamed herself for not being convincing enough when she had witnessed before the Committee. And I couldn't tell her that, somehow, Justice had been done. She died a few months later. It seemed she welcomed the illness that took away her life.

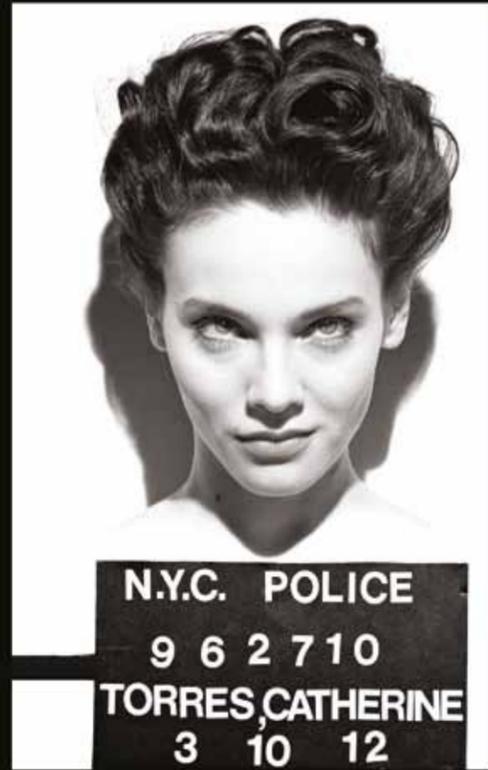
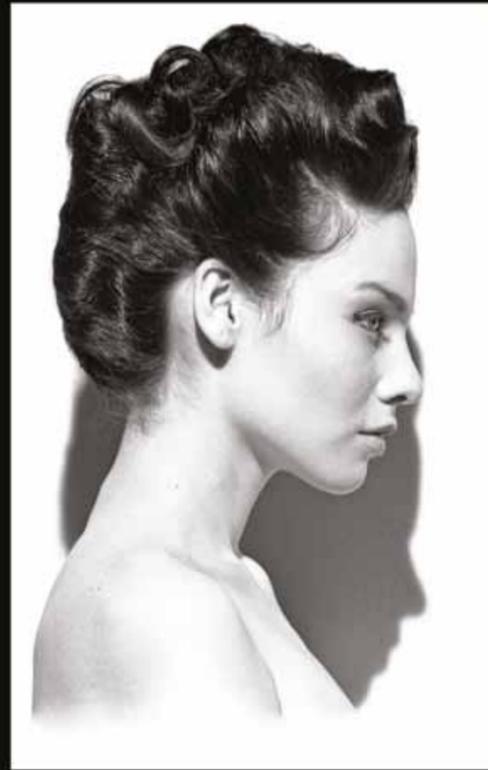
New York was not a random choice. My revenge was not complete yet. In Garfield's files I had found a few names of communists who lived there and might have been connected to the Soviet spy ring, though neither the FBI nor the HUAC had been able to prove it... or to frame them. I found the reds, introducing myself as Sam Kirby's daughter: though my name was different, I still had a few family photos to confirm that I was Catherine J. Kirby. My cover story: we were devoted communists, my father had been recruited by the

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Russian secret service NKVD and I wanted to follow his steps. The people on my list had nothing to do with the Soviets, but they knew someone who happened to know someone who might have a friend who was a Russian diplomat. The closed compartment organization of Russian spies in the US helped me: they couldn't know my father was not an agent, most of them only knew what the newspapers had printed. To them, Sam Kirby was a Soviet spy and had refused to name the names of his accomplices (simply because he had none, but they didn't know that either). One year later I ended up as a trusted courier of NKVD, in charge of delivering a suitcase full of dollars to their man in Washington D. C., a politician who was actually no commie. He just sold his country for money. When I met him, I recognized senator Alexander Burns, the man who had denied requesting a pro-Soviet movie. At the trial, he had said the letter my father gave to the Committee was a fake. Of course, it had been a careless move of his, signing a document that would prove his links with Moscow in the excitement of the war efforts. After that, he had to cover his ass, so he had to lay it all on Sam Kirby's door. And now, because of Burns, both my parents were dead. While he was alive, rich and getting richer. I wanted Justice! FBI and police were still out of the picture, since Burns was too well connected and protected. And this time I couldn't ask for the help of some Mafia family: Phil Sacco worked for the

East Coast families and this time they might be more careful. I had to do it alone. I had an advantage, anyway: I had established myself as a contact with the NKVD. I had given Burns a suitcase full of money. He'd trust me, if I contacted him for «new instructions» from Moscow. As a meeting point, I suggested a small hotel in Washington D.C., where we'd pass as the average couple of clandestine lovers. I still had a gun I had got from Phil Sacco. When Burns and I were alone in the room, I held him at gunpoint and ordered him to write a confession. I wanted him to clear my father's name. Things didn't go the way I expected. He tried to fight. I couldn't help shooting him. When the police arrived, my job was finished. The man was dead. Alexander Burns in Hell. I couldn't get the confession, though. And now there's no proof the late senator was a Russian spy. When the cops discovered I'm actually Kirby's daughter, they came to the conclusion I just wanted revenge on Burns. So did the newspapers. And the jury. Damn, probably my lawyer did too. I couldn't afford a better lawyer, anyway. In the end, this is my last chance to let you know what really happened. And it's also the final story by J. Towers on the pages of this magazine. My lawyer agreed to send it to my publisher first thing in the morning. By that time, I guess, Justice will be dead.



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 THANKS TO READY-SET SET DESIGN BROOKLYN PALADINO CASTING NYC DAN "THE SHARK" SHARNOFF JASON NOTO & JP RAMBER