Red Scare

“Mommy, the scary man is on TV again!” my six year-old daughter, Kennedy, called from the living room. My husband Jack’s jaw clenched, and we walked into the living room together.

“Turn it up, Kenny,” Jack sat down on the couch, and Kennedy ran over to the TV to turn it up. She hurried back and jumped up onto the couch, climbing into Jack’s lap. I sat down next to them, focused intently on the TV.

“I have here in my hand a list of two hundred and five people that were known to the Secretary of State as being members of the Communist Party and who nevertheless are still working and shaping the policy of the State Department,” I could feel my heart pounding in my head as Senator Joseph McCarthy spoke on our TV. Jack noticeably relaxed, and Kennedy looked back and forth between us.

“Daddy, what’s wrong?” Kennedy turned to face Jack, and he smiled. “Everything’s fine, sweetheart, don’t worry,” Jack said, and I could tell he was trying to not only convince Kennedy, but himself as well.

“How much longer do I have to keep this up?” I whispered into the telephone, glancing over my shoulder to ensure the light was still off upstairs. I couldn’t risk Ellie hearing this.

“Just until we know for sure what is being planned. You’re our best shot, Jack- don’t screw this up,” the angry Russian voice on the other end whispered back, and then abruptly hung up.

“Who was that? They didn’t sound too happy,” I whipped around, quickly putting the telephone back as Ellie walked over.

“Just a friend- he’s annoyed that the Browns beat the Eagles in the Super Bowl,” I stated nonchalantly, feeling sick to my stomach at how easily lies just spilled out nowadays.

“Oh no, did he bet a lot on the Eagles winning?” Ellie asked, getting a glass out of the cupboard and filling it up with water.

“You could say that,” I replied, walking back upstairs with her. And as I was trying to fall asleep, I couldn’t help but feel the guilt sweep all over me again. *What you’re doing could ruin this family. What you’re doing puts you in jail for years. And they kill spies like you in jail, Jack, you know that.*

“I don’t know how to word it- he just seems distant. Like other things are always on his mind and he’s not truly present,” I shrugged, and my best friend Annie sighed sympathetically.

“I bet its just stress. Everyone is feeling vulnerable these days, with all the Soviet stuff in the news,” she gestured towards our TV, where a news broadcast was playing on mute. Sure enough, the anchors were discussing the newest details on Soviet progression.

“But did you see that Senator? He’s all over the news and in the papers. He’s from Wisconsin and claims he has the answers of how to fight back against all the spying,” Annie eagerly slid the paper towards me, and sure enough, a huge picture of a middle-aged man named Joseph McCarthy covered about half the page, along with a story about him.

“He’s claiming that Soviet spies are everywhere and we have to take an aggressive approach to combat that. Everyone loves him so much already and they’ve coined a term for his leadership- McCarthyism. I think his ideas are great,” Annie nodded, watching me read it over.

“Are there really a ton of spies in America?” I asked, feeling worried. There was too much paranoia these days, and this certainly wouldn’t help.

“Yep- they’re everywhere. America’s pretty vulnerable right now,” Annie nodded, her eyes wide.

“Wow. I didn’t even know about that,” I kept reading, eager to know more.

“He’s targeting the US Army and Hollywood- can you believe that?” I shook my head in amazement as I continued reading. This was all so new to me, and I couldn’t believe something like this was actually happening.

“And if you’re accused, you’re dead meat. You deny your involvement- they arrest you. You admit to involvement- they arrest you. It’s a lose-lose situation,” Annie explained.

How on Earth is he getting away with this? I thought to myself as I read over the process of McCarthy and his committee, HUAC (House Un-American Activities) and how they “hunted down” the spies. *This is bad.*

“How was work today?” I asked as Jack sat down on the couch, letting out a long breath.

“Pretty boring- nothing that interesting is happening right now,” he shrugged, turning on the TV. I looked at him for a second, and something hit me. He looked exhausted. His cheeks had hollowed out slightly, the area under his eyes darker, and more wrinkles had appeared around his eyes.

“Jack, are you okay?” I asked softly, and he turned to look at me. He opened his mouth to speak but then shut it.

“Jack, tell me,” I leaned closer to him, starting to feel nervous. Jack hesitated, and opened his mouth to speak again but was cut off by the ringing of our doorbell.

“I’ll get it,” Jack slowly stood up and walked down the hallway. I followed, peeking through the window. My eyes widened when I saw the reflection of flashing blue and red lights dancing across our windowpane.

“Jack Parker?” the police officer asked as soon as Jack opened the door.

“Yes, can I help you?” Jack asked calmly, but I could feel the tension radiated off of him.

“You’re under arrest for crimes against the United States. Espionage for the Soviet Union,” the officer stated, and Jack turned around to be handcuffed.

“Wait, that’s not true! Jack, tell them that’s not true!” I protested, rushing over to him but being held back by the other officer.

“Mommy, what’s happening to Daddy? Who are these people?” Jack looked up quickly and the second he saw Kennedy standing at the top of the staircase, his face fell.

“Kenny, everything’s okay. This is a mistake. Daddy did nothing wrong,” I told her, turning to the officer. “Seriously, this is a mistake. You have the wrong guy.”

“Ellie, he’s not wrong,” Jack said in a barely audible voice, and I shook my head.

“Jack, you don’t have to lie! You don’t have to go along with this, you’re innocent!” I urged him to tell the truth, but he just stood there, his expression and body language defeated.

“I’m not innocent, Ell. They have the right guy,” Jack spoke up this time, and my hand flew up to cover my mouth, taking a step back. He wasn’t kidding. He wasn’t lying.

“We’re taking him down to the state prison, where he will be interrogated and probably transferred. He committed treason. I’m very sorry ma’am,” the officer nodded at me, and the door shut, Jack’s expression blank. The door shut before I could bring myself to speak.

I leaned back against the wall behind me and slowly sunk down, hitting the floor. And then the tears began.

Works Consulted

"Hollywood Ten." History.com. A&E Television Networks, Nov. 2009. Web. 03 Nov. 2015.

"Joseph R. McCarthy." History.com. A&E Television Networks, 2009. Web. 03 Nov. 2015.

"Joseph R. McCarthy Quotes." BrainyQuote. Xplore, n.d. Web. 03 Nov. 2015.

"McCarthyism." Wikipedia. Wikimedia Foundation, n.d. Web. 03 Nov. 2015.

"Red Scare." History.com. A&E Television Networks, 2010. Web. 03 Nov. 2015.