



The Feeling

**SUBURBAN SECRETS:
BEHIND CLOSED DOORS**



CAROL-ROSE MARSHALL

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BEHIND CLOSED DOORS

A novel by Carol-Rose Marshall

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Dedicated to all women who follow their feelings!

**“REACH FOR THE STARS ...
DREAM A DREAM ...
AND THEN -- WORK IT!”**

Carol-Rose Marshall

Author

ABOUT THE AUTHOR AND ABOUT THE BOOK

The author, Carol Rose Marshall grew up in New York City and relocated to the suburbs of Long Island during her marriage.

She was inspired to tell an untold story and unveil intimate events in this non-fiction work called *The Feeling*.

The Feeling is a unique book, representing the exposure of a secretive narrative that has been waiting to be told for over thirty years. It tells the story of Rachel and Michael Sanders, a couple living a suburban New York lifestyle in the 1970s who appeared to be as happy as the family on *The Brady Bunch*. Behind closed doors, they were anything but that.

Michael’s remorseless cheating interludes are linked to his unceasing anger and volatile moods.

Rachel unlocks her husband’s illicit affair, but her prime concern is to guard this secret, as she presumes it is her humiliation. It was a time when women’s voices were hushed. Her spot-on “Pearl Harbor” attack directed to his mistress is wildly bold.

Elements intriguing the reader are not limited to anger turning to rage, fear, cheating, sex, family, manipulation, and loss. What appears to be a normal family to others is not that way at all!

The story is an in-depth exploration of how feelings — simple and complex, acted upon or not — can change life’s outcome over the years for those caught in their web.

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DECEMBER 1976

It was the holiday season. Everybody was busy. Schedules for Christmas concerts that the kids participated in were carefully marked on the kitchen calendar, and extra activities were in full swing. The boys (Blue Team) were busy rehearsing with their respective musical instruments at school, and it was a noisy house when they rehearsed at home.

The Nutcracker Suite dance recital for the two “pink” ballerinas was also scheduled, and Casey and Carrie were busy twirling around the living room. They had to be careful and twirl around the TR6’s hardtop, which was firmly planted in the middle of the living room. This unusual sculpture had rented that space for the entire season. As usual, Mike was behind schedule, and his assurance that it would be removed by the end of October was clearly overdue. Rachel sighed, “I guess you can call it a conversation piece. Hopefully Mike’s promise to install it on the car this weekend will actually happen.”

Rachel had been clipping coupons and good-naturedly declared the season “a break from monotony.” There was always so much going on. She was first in line for sales, checking off her children’s requests, but with prices the way they were, there was no indication they might save money that year. Secret Santas had been put in place for the rest of the family, and the kids had made it a point to loudly exclaim in capital letters: *NO CLOTHES THIS YEAR!*

The Lady of the House had been intensely concentrating on constructing little triangles from phyllo dough sheets and filling them with mashed potatoes. She’d spent the night before boiling and then grating the potatoes for this undertaking. In other circles, they might be called *potato*

knishes. Hope it's worth the loss of two long fingernails, she'd thought. Certainly, a manicure is in order. Now, the big thing is not to let the phyllo dough dry out as it won't be pliable, and she'd allowed the ringing phone to go unanswered.

Next were pizza squares, miniature quiches, and frozen desserts—favorites of her kids. All in all, about 150 miniatures that would be gulped up in a second. Staring wistfully into space, she'd considered, *Is it really worth all this effort?* She'd carefully wrapped her edible masterpieces in saran and then foil to preserve in the freezer for HER party of the year. Everything was done on time, and Rachel felt very proud of herself.

Michael had been very busy at work, putting in long hours, with no extra compensation. Rachel had given up complaining, as hopefully, all his extra effort would pay off. Christmas bonuses were always welcome, and she was sure Mike's employers would reward him. Louie and Hannah Brown were a husband-and-wife team and co-owners of the company Mike worked for. In past years, the Browns were always very generous.

The first major snowstorm of the year, about eighteen inches, had shed a thick blanket burying the definition of their home, and Rachel loved the look of a fairy-tale winter wonderland.

"It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas," she'd hummed to herself.

There were several invitations from neighbors and friends for holiday parties. Rachel's mood was softening. The season had begun, and it was evident that she was determined to enjoy herself.

THE OFFICE PARTY

One of the events she looked forward to attending was Michael's Holiday Office Party, usually a gala affair. She had been disappointed that year. Mike told her, "Scrooge is being economical this year and only invited employees, EXCLUDING spouses."

It was her one opportunity to leave the suburbs, travel to Manhattan, and dress up city style. *Not fair, I was hoping to spend the night in the city, maybe at The Plaza, and enjoy cocktails, dinner, and dancing. Oh nuts, I'm relegated to being Cinderella. Rachel get over it!* she thought.

CHRISTMAS

The Sanders would have a full house Christmas Eve. Rachel's mom, Aunt CeeCee, Uncle Henry, Mike's parents and sister Shari, a few cousins, and several friends would be there. She'd decorated with the kids' help. It was their job to put the plastic Santa Claus out on the lawn and hide the candy canes for the other kids to find.

Rachel had known that before the kids accomplished these chores, they'd be soaked with snow, and have eaten at least one-quarter of the candy. No matter, it was Christmas. Everyone looked forward to the "Secret Santa" gifts, as the contents were always a surprise.

The big question that year was who would be Santa? Finally, Aunt CeeCee volunteered Uncle Henry, who didn't seem to fit the bill. He was probably about 120 pounds soaking wet and would need about twenty pillows to look the part.

Michael and Rachel had gone shopping, and the kids had an additional surprise coming. When they went down to the basement, they'd find a new ping-pong table. Actually, it was something the big kids (Mike and Rachel) had always wanted.

The hope was that everyone would forget all their problems. Even poor Shari, who was at the mercy of two attorneys. She had found out that two children were not enough to let her keep the house. It seemed that the more she asked for, the less she was getting.

And then, to make matters worse, their cousin Ellen had gossiped that Tim's new, young girlfriend had her eye on Shari's house. It wasn't that she WANTED it, but maybe the girlfriend would have a baby! Adrienne had screamed, "I will put a contract out on her and him!" Empty words, an impossible threat, but a distraught Adrienne was just at the end of her rope.

Rachel had comforted her mother-in-law. "That won't ever happen to all of you. It will work out."

Adrienne said, "At least you and Mike are in a good place. My last and only hope."

Despite all the drama, somehow, they'd pulled off a great Christmas Eve and everyone had felt good. Maybe it was the wine or perhaps the liquored cherries, or maybe just good old-fashioned family togetherness that had been comforting.

A HOLIDAY WRINKLE

At the beginning of the month, Mike had repeatedly said that he needed to buy gifts for the office staff. He complained, "It is something I have to do. Office politics, you know, in order to keep my job." Although Rachel had volunteered to do the shopping, he'd kept insisting, "You hardly know them, and it won't be as personal. I'd better do it. I'll do it faster, in and out of the stores, one, two, three. It'll be accomplished in record time."

The second Friday of December, Mike had announced that he wouldn't be home as it was the evening of the Brown's annual employee Christmas party. Rachel had felt a twinge of annoyance for being excluded, but she'd good-naturedly agreed, "It is what it is, and out of our control."

She felt like calling the wife of Mike's boss, and maybe wangling a last-minute invite, but decided it would look nervy. Besides, Mike vehemently opposed the idea, and that was the end of the discussion.

On Friday morning, she'd watched Mike leave the house looking like a million bucks. He'd certainly appeared prosperous in his new sports car, looking fit as a fiddle AND happy as a lark.

He'd very carefully put on his new Pierre Cardin, dark blue suit, highly polished shoes, and a bright solid gold tie, set off with a matching handkerchief neatly placed in the jacket's top pocket. She couldn't believe that he was wearing a shirt with French cuffs AND the gold cuff links that Rachel had given him for his fortieth birthday. She'd thought, *I would definitely go out with you.*

Before he'd left, she'd asked him, "If the party is so *economical*, where are you going in such near-formal attire?"

Mike had said, "I just want to stand out."

In a sad voice she'd said, "Okay, talk to you later, have a good time, and don't forget to miss me." Mike had leaned over and kissed her cheek, and said, "I ALWAYS miss you." Those were comforting words, and Rachel waved goodbye, feeling much better.

She'd had a lunch date with her friend Jean and then waited for the kids to come home and Roz, who would be coming for the weekend. She was always welcome and was her daughter's security blanket, no matter how old she got.

Roz arrived with stories about work, and the way people were, and poor Adrienne with her daughter's humiliation. "Men suck," said Roz, "and don't I know it! Go sweetheart, take a Jacuzzi, put your feet up and I'll handle everything. You deserve a night off."

“Mom, you have no idea how good that sounds,” said a grateful Rachel. “See you in the a.m.,” and she’d raced up the steps to the bedroom.

Mike had been calling her all day long, with sweet nothings, and for no reason at all. She was feeling safe and loved, particularly when he told her that the party would be no fun without her. She’d been so at ease that she’d fallen asleep and hadn’t heard a sound until the next morning.

The morning sun woke her, and she’d immediately asked Mike about the party. “Did everyone like their gifts? What did you eat?”

Sporting a totally happy mood, Mike was more than willing to tell her every detail. He’d rapidly told her how boring it was, the food was lousy, the people had been complaining, and to top it all off, the boss had been chintzy with Christmas bonuses. He said that his bonus was half that of last year’s, but that he’d give it to her in total to pay off some cards.

WHAT’S THAT?

When she’d finished clearing the breakfast dishes, she turned around and noticed something shiny encircling Mike’s neck. Moving closer to him, it appeared to be a smooth, glossy, modern-style, wide-link (MAYBE) white gold necklace. He’d taken off his usual yellow gold necklace and was displaying this one.

She’d asked, “Mike, that’s new. Where did you get it?”

Mike gave a hearty laugh and said, “You won’t believe it—remember Mary, the old lady who sits in the back office? Well, she surprised me with it.”

Rachel WAS greatly surprised and said, “WHAT? It looks expensive.”

With a totally confident demeanor, Mike had answered, “That’s what I thought, but I’d helped her out with a mistake she’d made and fixed it before the boss saw it, and then gave her a ride

home.” He rattled on, “She was terrified of the sports car and couldn’t wait to get out of it. Poor thing, she’s about sixty-five, ready to retire, but still needs the job, and she was so grateful that she gave me this. It is nice, isn’t it? I wonder if it’s worth anything. But no matter, I want her to know I like it, so I’ll have to wear it to the office *ALL* the time.” So many words, all at once, that he’d had to take a deep breath.

“Let’s see it Mike,” Rachel said as she undid the clasp. A careful inspection showed it was credibly stamped 18K gold. “Wow, this is amazing. It’s beautiful. She must have really been in trouble.”

Squirming out of his seat, Mike had changed the subject. “I promised the girls that when they are off from school, I’d take them to the office for the day. You know how the staff makes such a fuss over them!”

“Oh sure,” said Rachel, “they’ll love that, but NO sports car, there are two of them. You can take them on the railroad, they’ll love that too. You can take the boys another day!”

“No,” retorted Mike, “the boys hate that. They are too old. Just the girls.”

Rachel hadn’t argued as it was true, the boys didn’t find anything interesting about sitting in an office all day. She could drop them off to bowl while their sisters were gone and get a lot done. It sounded like a plan.

Christmas Eve had come and gone. The family portion of the guests all slept over. Roz and Adrienne had wandered off together to discuss the issues of life, and Jake had gone to sleep. The kids were thrilled with the toys they were allowed to open, and everyone else went home.

At the crack of dawn, the kids were downstairs on Christmas Day, and the chaos had begun. By the time 1 p.m. rolled around, it seemed like a week had passed, and their togetherness was exhausted. Adrienne and Jake said they would drive home and drop Roz off as well.

A PHONE CALL

Rachel thought, *I can't believe that I never made the bed.* That was a definite no-no for her.

She went up to their bedroom and found Mike with his back to the door, whispering on the phone. He turned and acknowledged her with a nod, and then softly said into the phone, "Would you believe that she is picking this very moment to make the bed?"

Rachel went about making the bed quickly, left the room, and thought about picking up the extension, but decided against it. Rachel went downstairs and waited for Mike to join her. When Mike walked past her in the kitchen, she said, "Who were you talking to?"

Mike answered, "My sister. She got home okay."

Rachel thought, *that's strange; Shari must have raced to have made it in such good time* but said nothing.

She and Mike had agreed that Tuesday would be the best day for him to take the twins to his office. The boys had arranged bowling games for that day and were looking forward to seeing their friends. Rachel would relish being alone in the house, to put away the remnants of Christmas.

TAKE YOUR KIDS TO THE OFFICE

The twins had been so excited to ride the commuter railroad and were ready and waiting at 7 a.m. on Tuesday morning for their adventure to begin.

They knew Daddy would take them out to lunch, and the secretaries would let them play with the office equipment. They'd also heard that the boss and his wife had presents for them, so what could be better? Even the weather cooperated. Although it was very cold, at least it wasn't

raining or snowing to complicate the day. Rachel was always amazed how quickly she could get things done alone. The house was back to being neat as a pin in no time. She decided to call Mike and see how he was managing with the twins.

Apparently it was lunchtime, and Mary answered the phone, as she was filling in for the receptionist. Rachel took the opportunity to tell her what good taste she had. “Mary, I hope you had a Merry Christmas. How are you?”

Mary replied, “I’m fine, and just getting over having my grandchildren for the holiday. I think I’m too old for this. Mike took the girls to lunch. They are really adorable and have gotten so big.”

Rachel said, “Yes, they are growing up, and I know what you mean; I’m exhausted from the holidays too. By the way, Mary, you have such good taste!”

Mary answered, “Why thanks Rachel, but I really dress very simply.”

Rolling her eyes, Rachel said, “No Mary, I mean with the gift that you gave Mike.”

“Oh,” Mary answered, “it was nothing ’cause he’s soooo nice to me. I thought a book was a good idea so that he can read it on the days he takes the railroad.”

Rachel had been speechless, but slowly recovered and said, “Oh, yes, right, it was a book that you gave—yes, such good taste, like I said. By the way, was Mr. Brown generous to you this Christmas?”

Mary excitedly answered, “Oh yes, we were all surprised! He gave us double the bonus we got last year. You know, we MISSED YOU BOTH at the party this year, and hope YOU are better. My husband and I had to sit with people we didn’t know instead, but it was a beautiful affair, and we all danced until we collapsed, even at my age. Oops there goes the phone; I’ll tell Mike to call you when he gets back.”

Rachel had quietly said, “No problem . . . and yes, I am better now. Have a good New Year’s. Bye.” Rachel had been shaking and dumbfounded as she got off the phone. The conversation was a shock, and she’d felt herself sweating in the middle of December. She didn’t know if she was sick, hurt, or angry.

Each FEELING rolled into one another.

All she COULD do was think about how she should handle this information. It was clear. It wasn’t just the lies, but something major was going on with her husband! She’d started to feel a throbbing in the back of her head. Nothing lined up, she’d thought, *and where was the rest of the Christmas bonus money? Where did he go the night of the party? And who gave him that necklace? Who was he speaking to on the phone on Christmas day? Had he really been working late all those times?* Everything had started falling into place in her racing mind.

She’d noticed her reflection in the hall mirror. She looked white and pale, as though all the blood had drained from her. “I’m feeling . . . sick,” she slowly said aloud, as though someone was there to help her through this.

When the phone rang, she let the answer machine go to voice mail. It was Michael calling her back, complaining about his day and that the girls were okay, and they would be home on the 6:48 train. She’d decided not to call back as she couldn’t, not without crying or attacking him. She’d had to really think about everything. Usually, her rule of thumb was, *when you don’t know exactly what to do, DO NOTHING! There was too little truth. There were too many lies.*

OMG, THERE WAS TOO MUCH BAD INFORMATION!

When her mind cleared, and she’d stopped crying, she’d put it into perspective. She had decided that to confront him would only result in his not speaking for weeks. Knowing Michael, she wouldn’t get anywhere, and of course, he would lie and offer no information. It would mean that

the kids' Christmas holiday would be down the drain, tarnished by another of Mike's moods, and to top it off, she had no real evidence.

She'd then decided to place her conversation with Mary on the back burner, and file it away in the recesses of her mind, at least for the time being. However, that FEELING WAS BACK. And it wasn't just one. It had combined with a sickening feeling, a frightened feeling, an angry feeling, a hurtful feeling.

THERE WERE MANY FEELINGS—TOO MANY TO BEAR.

She needed someone, anyone!

"This was a revelation, the lies, secret meetings, secret calls," she ranted to herself. "You don't need to be a rocket scientist to figure this one out. But WHO, the question is, WHO is it?" She spoke to the empty room, "It's a betrayal—how could it be?"

Her mind wandered and she'd thought, *I can't tell mom. It will kill her. I am the same age as she was when dad left, and Mike is the same age as him. My Dad bought a sports car when he had his affair. Michael bought a sports car. Good Lord, I have been putting up with his mood swings, but I never thought that he would do this.*

She kept on thinking, *there are other people this will affect. Oh, poor Adrienne—first Shari and now us. Could I be wrong? I don't know.*

All the joy of the holiday planning was drained from her. She didn't want to do anything. She would not answer the phone, even if it was her mom. She decided that she had to be careful, because the first person that gave her a loving hello would hear it all.

Before she knew it, it was 5 p.m. and very dark outside. Her mood was just as dark as the night and so very foreboding. She decided to pull herself together. Say nothing, watch, and learn. She could do that. She'd been caught off guard, but now would be ON GUARD!

When the boys called and asked if they could do a sleepover at their friend Jeffrey Green's house, just down the block, she had been all for it. Surely, someone was watching over her, for this invite to happen.

At 7:15 p.m., Mike returned with the twins. Both girls were exhausted and started to push their boots off vigorously as soon as they entered the house. They had packages full of candy, erasers, pencils, and coloring books from the office. The boss's wife had gifted them with antique twin dolls that were replicas of each twin. They were surely collector's items, but Rachel couldn't give them the proper appreciation.

Mike had been in a good mood and sat down in the family room. Rachel had greeted them as though nothing had happened and took the twins upstairs. It took all her energy. Tired as they were, Rachel sat them up on the bathroom countertop. It was too late for baths, and she didn't have the strength. She started sponging their hands and faces clean, quickly put them in their pajamas, and said with determination, "So, tell me, what did you eat for lunch?"

Carrie, always cuddly, was hugging and kissing Rachel. Casey, on the other hand, was answering for both girls and started giggling, "Yeah, we all had hamburgers at the diner."

Rachel asked with conviction, "Who was ALL?"

Casey continued, "Me and Carrie, and daddy and Maria."

Carrie now interjected, "Yeah."

Rachel bit her lip. The hits kept coming, and she calmly continued her interrogation, "Really, what did dad eat?"

"Same," said Casey.

Rachel asked, "And, what did Maria eat?"

"She had a Veal Parmiggggg," Casey giggled.

Carrie added, “With spaghetti, yeah!”

In a contained, quiet voice, Rachel asked, “Which one is Maria again?”

Carrie tried to hug her mother as Casey answered, “You know, the girl who sits at the desk when you come in, she’s a FRONT person. That’s what the sign said—*FRONT Desk!*”

Carrie added, “Yep, we could read it, mommy.”

With tongue in cheek, Rachel asked, “Was she nice? “

Carrie and Casey looked at each other, started laughing, and said, “Yeah, mom, she’s silly. She and dad kept laughing at each other and talking and talking. And he was silly too.”

Rachel thought, *my gut tells me, this is who it is*, and while tickling the twins, she slowly asked, “Didn’t they talk to you?”

One after the other, her chatterboxes were off and running, each twin consecutively volunteering information.

“Sure, they did, she has boy kids.”

“She told us about them.”

“They don’t sit good in a restaurant like we do.”

“They were whispering, and sometimes we couldn’t hear them, so we just ate our hamburgers.

Daddy said we were good, and we got ice cream sundaes too.”

Rachel was relentless and had to know, “Did you walk to the diner?”

Casey volunteered, “Nope, we rode in the back of Maria’s car and Daddy drove, and then we couldn’t hear a word they said in the front.”

“Look mom, daddy’s boss gave us five dollars each for working all day. We stapled papers together, and they said we did a good job. We can work in an office. Yes, we can!”

“Wow,” Rachel had managed, “I am so proud of you. Let’s get you into bed.”

THE INQUISITION WAS OVER

The girls had fallen asleep as soon as their heads hit their pillows. Rachel had gone downstairs, observed Mike asleep in his recliner and went back upstairs to her bedroom. By then, after her third degree, it was 9 p.m.

A SINKING FEELING

You know, the feeling you get at the beach?

It happens when you are standing in the sand at the ocean's shoreline.

The waves come, and you feel the undertow under your feet.

It makes you WOBBLY and then the sand loosens under your feet, and through your toes.

Although you struggle, it still pulls you DOWN. There's nothing to grab on to. If you don't balance yourself, it pulls you down, right on your RUMP.

You know the FEELING?

That was how Rachel felt, as though the floor had been removed right out from under her. She could not grab any traction, and she was falling.

She thought, *there is NO ONE to catch me—I have no control. I AM falling . . . all is lost . . . I AM DOWN!*

THE REALIZATION

OMG, he subjected his children to this! ARE my thoughts running away? Could I be wrong?

No, Rachel, do you need to be hit by a Mack Truck to make you understand? Put it all together.

Get out of La-La Land—this is the real deal! Your husband is CHEATING. You are in jeopardy,

AND your children are in jeopardy. EVERYTHING you ever worked for is in jeopardy. Whatever were you thinking, and where have you been? OMG!

She instructed herself, “Get with the program and start adding two and two together—the gym, the new car, the reaching-forties syndrome—this is one big classic scenario. I just never thought it would happen to me. But then again, NO, in my heart, I really knew, I just didn’t want to believe it!”

When she’d woken up the next morning, her plan had been to watch and wait for the right moment to confront Michael. Try as she did, she couldn’t even look at him. He suddenly wasn’t handsome, he was UGLY!

They were committed to New Year’s Eve at her friend Eveline and Steve’s home. They used to laughingly call them “Even-Steven’s house,” and to make matters worse, the whole neighborhood would be there. She would have to show and continue this farce.

She had made the “yummy treats” for the kids’ pre-party before she and Mike left, and her mom was coming, her trusted babysitter. She would try to get through this without disturbing everyone’s good time.

With inward tremors, she’d dressed carefully for the party and thought she looked great. She was sexy-looking, and Mike had tried to reach for her. She slipped away from him and thought, *no, not tonight, eat your heart out, Mike!*

She had decided she would refuse to fight with him that night. But try as she did, she couldn’t help herself. She made the one crucial mistake by asking Michael to take off his new necklace for the party and wear the one she had given him. He refused to do it, and a whole ruckus ensued.

They'd gone off to the party, and Mike was NOT talking to her. Her friend Eveline had noticed, asked what was wrong, and Rachel confided that they had a fight earlier.

Rachel said, "Eve, we have to leave at midnight, if we can make it that far." Eve said, "Hey, it happens to the best of us. Here's a hug."

Mike had barely looked at her at midnight, much less said Happy New Year, and obviously no kisses.

When they got home, she'd made it impossible for him to use the phone, and he'd become more irritable and frustrated by the minute.

I'll be dammed if I let him call her, she thought, moving from room to room as he did. "No more Mrs. Nice Girl," she muttered.

Michael walked around looking like a caged animal, but she wouldn't give an inch.

Rachel thought, *oh, what a tangled web we weave, when first we practice to deceive!* She could see he was uncomfortable and that he didn't know what to do. In a sick, but hurtful way, she had enjoyed this and thought, *you know, he's NOT really good at this game. Things are going to change, Sanders.*

Her thoughts kept racing; *I won't put up with your moods! I should have listened to Aunt CeeCee so many years ago. But here we are . . . AND with four children!*

Finally, Mike gave up, and Rachel watched him go up to bed. She turned off the lights and triumphantly followed him.

He'd closed his eyes, and Rachel sat down at her dressing table, slowly removing her jewelry.

She looked at her wedding band and thought, *A symbol that has no symbolism now.*

Brushing her hair while staring sadly into the mirror, she softly sang to herself,

*Mirror, Mirror on the Wall,
Who's the worthiest one of all?*

She answered back, "IT'S ME, AND A HAPPY NEW YEAR TO YOU, RACHEL!"