

No Regrets

Caroline Seebohm

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In a society in which women were expected to take a backseat to men, Marietta Peabody was a rebel. Her first marriage, to Desmond FitzGerald, one of the founders of the modern CIA, failed ultimately because she was too independent and insisted on a career of her own. Of course, that she had met and fallen in love with Ronald Tree, an immensely wealthy and attractive member of the upper echelons of British society, also played a part in the breakup of her marriage. As the wife of Ronald Tree, Marietta was introduced to British society but found that world somewhat too stuffy for her tastes. It was when she and Ronnie moved their base of operations from England to New York and Barbados, however, that Marietta's true strengths as hostess and confidante to the rich and powerful came to the fore. Using these talents, she developed a close alliance with Adlai Stevenson and worked tirelessly for him during his unsuccessful bids for the U.S. presidency. In gratitude, he arranged her appointment as U.S. delegate to the Human Rights Commission under the sponsorship of the United Nations. Marietta Tree's untimely death in 1991, of cancer, marked the end of an era. She was among the last of a small, select group of women - which included Pamela Harriman and Slim Keith - who helped define the new standards of American womanhood. Passionately involved in civil rights and Democratic politics, Marietta Tree harnessed her femininity, wit, and intelligence to the cause of public service, and in so doing, found the energy and strength to be a truly independent spirit.



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