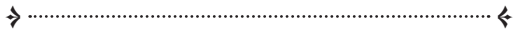


SECRETS



by Shelley Pryde

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Barbara Mueller
New Voices Publishing

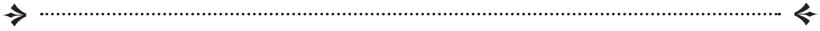
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To the One who gave me the ideas for this story and the talent to write it. To my Lord and Saviour, my safe refuge, Jesus Christ.

Prologue



She hummed along to the familiar tune playing on the radio, noting her newborn son's soft cooing in the back seat. She smiled to herself. Not a person knew of the infant's birth. No one but his only grandmother.

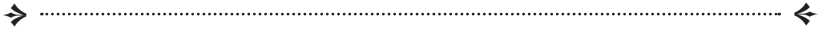
The mist rose and clouded her path. She strained to see the road before her, struggling to see through the thick blanket in her way.

Her son gave a strange yell in the back seat. She turned around to see what was wrong. Seeing nothing amiss, she turned back to face the road. She was too late.

All she saw was the glare of the headlights, heard the loud blaring of the hooter. And her final thought as the truck's tall shadow loomed over them, and her son's whining ceased in a single second,

"My son..."

Chapter 1



That afternoon, a teary-eyed mother bid a sorrowful farewell to her son at the train station, just as a wealthy banker strode by, lost in his thoughts of wealth and power. Across the road, an elderly man sat on his porch, reading of current events in the local newspaper. As a group of rowdy teenagers passed, the man looked over his round spectacles to wave. All of them, continuing with their lives as usual, all of them oblivious as to what was happening a few meters away, near the house of Eleanor West. All of them oblivious to the small boy, crouching on the branch of a tree that overlooked Eleanor's overgrown garden.

He was waiting. Waiting to hear the sound that would signal him to begin and make his move. He shifted uneasily, growing nervous.

The sun began to dip under the horizon, and the townsfolk began to return to the comfort of their homes for the evening. The boy crouched even lower, growing weary. At that moment, a shrill whistle broke the silence of the evening. The boy started, suddenly alert. It was the warning. He listened for the next whistle. He saw the door of the old house swing open, and watched as a young blonde woman stepped out and made her way down the street.

The whistle blew again and he leaped lithely into the garden, creeping silently in the shadows. He moved towards the windows, unseen under the dark blanket that was sweeping over the skies. He was on his own now.

He reached up to grab the ledge, but pulled back instantly when he saw the curtain in the window rustle slightly. He held his breath, watching for trouble. Soft footsteps moved past inside the house and eventually disappeared. He let out his breath.

‘Must keep moving.’

He climbed onto the window ledge and brushed the curtains aside. Everything was dark. He jumped down onto the floor, surprised at how loud the sound seemed. His heart pounded wildly in his chest as he tip-toed from room to room, his rubber-soled shoes making no sound on the brownish tiles.

Once he found the attic, he began to relax. He climbed over huge piles of dusty boxes to get to the other side of the room, where the old chest lay. It was covered in cobwebs, and the aged wood was beginning to rot. He opened it carefully and saw what he needed lying in the bottom corner. He held it up in front of his face. A little red silk bag. Surely it would be alright for him to take a peek at the contents? His boss wouldn’t mind, would he? Thinking of Mr. Dos Santos, the boy shook his head. He would be furious if he found out. Better not risk it. But, as the boy looked at the bag again, his curiosity got the better of him.

He opened it and saw the object that Mr. Dos Santos so desperately craved to own. He gasped. So this was the big secret.

There was a creak from below, and the boy jumped at the sound. He looked out of the window and saw that the blonde woman had returned. He heard voices. They were coming up the stairs! He shoved the object back into the

bag and escaped through the window, just as a slightly plump woman wearing a floral dress bounded fiercely into the room, brandishing an old broom.

Zachary Jacobs pulled his hat lower over his brow and shoved his hands in his pockets. Those thugs were late, just as he had suspected. Despite his relaxed posture, Zach was uneasy. There was no way of telling whether Dos Santos and his crew would stick to the arrangements, and Zach was fearful of what they might do.

“Expect rain tomorrow,” came a voice.

Zach looked up. A tall, burly man stood before him.

“Snow for Friday, then,” Zach replied.

The other man smiled, recognizing the code.

“So, here’s the deal,” said Zach, taking off his hat, “I’ll keep quiet about the operation, if your boss gives me the CD. Got it?”

“Hmm...” the man said, flaring his nostrils slightly. “I’m not sure the boss would like that. He gave me direct orders.”

The man attempted a sinister smile, failing miserably.

“What do you mean?” Zach stepped back.

“We’ll see.”

A damp cloth was pushed against Zach’s mouth. He swung around, searching for his attacker. The cloth was still pressed firmly over his mouth and nose. His vision blurred and he sank down onto the concrete floor. He could hear the burly man laughing stupidly in the distance, and his thoughts

swirled in his head. Then, everything went black.

Eleanor West sighed as she plunked into one of the high-backed leather chairs that occupied her living room. She knew there had been something in the attic, and yet, when she arrived at the scene, she hadn't noticed anything out of the ordinary.

“Probably just the rats.” Patricia had concluded.

Eleanor shook her head stubbornly at the thought of her younger sister's words.

“Too loud to be rats!” she said to herself. But what did she know? She was just an old spinster. Thirty-six going on seventy.

She just knew it had been a prowler! He was fast to have escaped so quickly after Eleanor had heard the thump from the attic. Luckily, she had not noticed anything missing. But, she reasoned, surely he would be back to claim whatever prize he sought to own, (assuming that the burglar was a he) and this time, he wouldn't get away. She knew that what he was looking for was in the old chest; as he had left it open in his hurried escape. But what could he be looking for in there? There was nothing of value except...

“Oh no!” cried Eleanor, “Antonio!”

She hurried frantically up the stairs and burst into the attic. She hurled the old chest open and searched.

“It's... it's gone!”

Antonio smirked and downed the last gulp of his drink. His gold tooth glinted in the dim light of the empty bar as he snickered wickedly to himself. Things were finally going his way. The CD had been a lucky break. It revealed the whereabouts and details of every customer of the IPP in the area, and it had been just what Antonio needed.

He pounded his fist on the table in front of him.

“Refill!” he called rudely.

An attractive young woman came over with a bottle of whisky. Antonio was about to say something when his cell phone rang. It was the idiot.

“Yes?” Antonio said impatiently, scowling as the woman began to walk off.

“We have Jacobs, Mr. Dos Santos, sir.”

Antonio smiled, forgetting his disappointment.

“Good. Drop him off at the apartment and get over here.”

“Yessir.”

Antonio took a swig of his whiskey and leaned forwards, resting his elbows on the bar. He heard the doors behind him burst open and he turned around.

A small 13 year old boy clambered through the door. He had jet-black hair and dark green eyes, and he was wearing black from head to toe.

“I got it, sir!” he said, handing the man a red silk bag.

Antonio’s eyes glinted hungrily as he fingered the little bag. He looked back at the boy.