

STOLEN SECRETS

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RED ROCK MYSTERIES

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JERRY B. JENKINS • CHRIS FABRY

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CHAPTER 1

✧ Ashley ✧

I was the first one into the mirrored room at Peak Academy of Dance. We call it PAD. I put my stuff in the corner and started stretching. The last couple of days Mom had spent a lot of time on the phone, I guess with Sam. I had no idea where he had gone. Leigh stayed away from Bryce and me. It was all so mysterious.

Only Dylan was normal. When he gets a scratch anywhere on his body, he puts Band-Aids over it. Today he put three on his right arm, four on his left, one on his forehead, and even one in his hair. It was the first time I'd seen Mom smile in days.

Mom told Bryce that Sam would be back by Saturday, but Bryce

didn't seem to care. The two of us hadn't talked much about Sam's confession, but I'd written several pages in my journal.

What do you do when you find out your stepdad is the reason you're miserable? What do you do when the man your mother chose to marry says he's responsible for the death of the father you loved?

Bryce and I had moved to Colorado from Illinois with our mom and little brother. Our real dad had died in a plane crash—the news said it was terrorists, but now . . .

A year later Mom met Sam at a memorial service for the victims. Sam's wife and daughter were killed in the same crash. Mom and Sam fell in love and were married.

Sam adopted us and we took his last name. A year after that, Mom got religious on us. We thought it would pass, but it didn't, and soon Bryce and I both became Christians.

Sometimes when things like this are going on, I walk through life in a daze. Dancing helps me focus. It's kind of like my mom's writing, I guess. I get into another world. The music and the movement take over, and for an hour I go someplace else in my mind.

I didn't want the hour to end. When it did, Mrs. Gunderson came in. She's the head of the academy. She had us all sit down and explained that this would be the last week for candle sales for PAD.

"You know how important this is," she said with a smile, "so I'm expecting big results. And the one who sells the most will win these." She produced a pair of ballet shoes like the professionals wear.

I looked at my own ratty shoes and my heart sank. I had sold only one candle, and that was to Mom. The girls around me squealed and whispered how many each had sold, which made me even more depressed.

While we packed up our stuff, parents peeked in the window, whispering to each other, then escorted their kids outside. Weird. As I walked through the lobby past the front desk, I found the door locked.

"We'd like you to wait inside for your mother, Ashley," Mrs. Gunderson said.

"But I always meet her in the parking lot."

"Tonight's different, dear."

I got a drink of water and noticed one of the dance teachers guarding the back door.

"What's going on?" I said to my friend Hayley.

She shrugged as she changed into her tennis shoes. "Place is on lockdown. Maybe somebody stole something."

"They'd be going through our stuff if that happened," I said. "There's your mom."

Mrs. Henderson rushed in and hugged Hayley, something I had never seen her do. People whispered everywhere, and I was relieved when Mom pulled into the parking lot and hurried in.

"What's wrong?" I said as we headed out.

"Something terrible, Ashley."



CHAPTER 2

☺ Bryce ☺

“Box out!” Box out!” Coach Baldwin yelled. “Timberline, where are you?”

“Sorry, Coach,” I said.

Coach Baldwin tucked the basketball under his left arm and stared at us. Our seventh grade team had finished with six wins and four losses. Now we were playing in a regional league, trying to get ready for the next school season.

“Coronado is probably the best in the league,” Coach said. “Let’s focus.” He called a play and threw the ball to Duncan Swift, our point guard.

I slipped back to my defensive position, and Kael Barnes set a pick on me.

“What’s up with you, Bryce?” Kael said, pushing me back and turning. The ball shot past my outstretched arm, right into Kael’s hands. He stepped toward the basket and banked the ball in off the backboard.

“That’s it! That’s it!” Coach said. “Way to push the ball inside.” He looked at me. “Move your feet, Timberline.”

Later, in the locker room, Kael sat beside me. “You’ve been spacey all week, Bryce. Boo Heckler after you again?”

I smiled. “Haven’t heard from him since he tied my pants in knots.” Boo had threatened Ashley and me if we didn’t let him ride our ATVs. “Baldwin has him scrubbing toilets during gym class.”

“So what’s your problem?”

I shrugged. “Nothing, really.” No way I could tell him. Ashley and I hadn’t even been allowed to tell our friends we had foiled a robbery at Gold Town and had almost gotten killed in the process. I wasn’t about to let it slip that Sam said he had killed my real father.

Coach Baldwin said we’d need to wait inside for our parents to pick us up. “And, Timberline, your mom called. Said to leave the ATV and wait for a ride from her.”

“What? Why?”

“Your mom must have seen you at practice,” Duncan said.

Everybody laughed.

Riding the ATV is one of my favorite things. It’s mostly pasture between the practice gym and home. On the dirt road behind the gym I can open the thing up and go fast. I love the sound of the wind on my helmet. With everything going on with Sam, I need all the good things I can find, and the ATV is the best.

I grabbed my backpack and raced down the steps. Mom pulled

up outside with Ashley in front. My sister looked like someone had stolen her tutu.

“Why can’t I ride the ATV—?”

“Bryce, please,” Mom said. “Get in.”

“What’s wrong?”

Ashley turned. “Two girls were attacked after school.”

“It’s all over the news,” Mom said. “The report said they were from Red Rock Middle School.”