

Web Secrets

Prologue: Dark Shadows

Distant rumblings of thunder taunted the balmy night air as sheet lightning lit up the ominous sky and sent icy shivers across Madison's neck. She waited in the shadows with her breath caught in her chest, her insides shivering with fear. Reaching her shaking hand into her pocket, she clasped the cold, metal gun and held it in front of her. She pressed back into the brick wall and swallowed hard against the deafening silence, trying not to make a sound.

Suddenly, the heavy door swung open and meticulous footsteps crunched the stones on the rooftop patio as they moved steadily towards her. Fear shot up into her chest and thumped like a bass drum against her rib cage. Tears began to trickle from her eyes and her ears pulsated with the intensity of her heartbeat. She wiped the snuffles that dripped on to her upper lip with her sleeve and flicked her dark locks back over her shoulder. Staring ahead, too terrified to blink, she held the weapon firmly in both her hands.

She hated guns. They terrified her. But it was the only defense she had to ward off a psychopath who wouldn't stop until he had killed her.

"You can't run away from me. There's no way out."

His cynical voice echoed in her head and she trembled even more. He called her name again in soft, disparaging chants as the disturbing sound of his footsteps on the gravel drew defiantly closer. She shifted her eyes towards the door that was hidden in the shadows of a brick wall. He called her name again and she gasped as his silhouette drew closer. He took another step. Her heart pounded harder. She swallowed again and stared through blurry eyes.

There was a sharp noise to the left of her, and instinctively she turned towards the sound. Nothing was there. She looked back quickly and her heart jumped. She screamed. He was standing right in front of her and the light on the nearby wall reflected a hideous smile that ripped through her like a two edged sword. She tried to move but her legs had

become like rubber and her body was paralysed from fear. She stared into his deep, devilish eyes and trembled.

Madison gripped the gun tighter and tried to fire it, but her hands trembled and she fumbled it as she tried again and again. She stared at him blankly as he quietly reached down and took it out of her hands. Tears flowed uncontrollably down her cheeks as she held her hands over her face.

He reached towards her again and this time he wrapped his arm around her and pulled her up and close to his side. She cried out as she grabbed his hand and tried to pull it off of her.

“No, please. Please, let me go.”

She dug her heels into the tiny stones and slapped at his hands repeatedly as he forced her across the patio floor. He stopped at the balcony railing on the far wall that overlooked the busy New York street eight stories below.

Madison screamed as he let go of her and she fell backwards onto a cement bench. She gasped as she landed painfully on the edge of the solid fixture, and then squirmed away from him as she tried to regain her composure. Her gun fell out of his jacket pocket and landed on the ground a few feet away.

He spoke slowly and methodically. There was a resemblance of repentance in his voice that was soon overpowered with a threatening monotone.

“You keep looking at the door. Your friend isn’t coming.”

His words felt like a knife stabbing into her heart and she struggled to speak. Her chest thumped almost louder than her ears pulsated yet, his voice cut through like a piercing blade. Her face stung and her eyes welled up even more, and she began blinking away the tears. She clenched her hands at her chest and spotted the gun on the floor through the corner of her eye. But he was fast. It was as if he could read her thoughts and he turned his head to look at it.

“This what you want?”

She swallowed hard several times and bit on her trembling lips. She tried to speak in between her choppy breaths but nothing came out. She stared at the gun that he was pointing only inches from her face.

“Take it.”

Her eyes shifted back and forth between his incensed glare and the daunting barrel. He told her again in a quiet, monotone voice to take the gun but the eeriness of his expression sent waves of terror through her body and all she could do was stare at him.

“Okay, I’ll leave this right here and we’ll see who draws first.”

She didn’t move her head but her eyes followed him as he placed the loaded gun on the bench beside her. Madison stared at it through her tears; her hands still clenched together at her chest and her breathing so hard and erratic that it burned her lungs. If only she could break the fearful trance, she’d reach over and pick up the gun, but she couldn’t move.

She closed her eyes and for a split second her thoughts drifted back to her apartment and the joy that she shared with her husband. She remembered how James would come through the front door and rub his five-o’clock shadow against her cheek, holding her tightly in his arms as he kissed her passionately on the lips. But her heart was quickly filled with sorrow because she knew she would never be with her husband again.

She opened her eyes slowly and looked up into her assailant’s demeaning eyes, seeing an evil that she’d never seen in anyone before. Chilling sensations of terror shot across the nape of her neck and she knew that he would kill her. Staring at her with cold eyes, he aimed his gun at her head and said goodbye. Madison closed her eyes and left her ears to cope with the exploding sound of the gunshot.