



The Secret

by Chris Robinson

Sonia stared at her phone in disbelief. The text read 'They know everything'. Just three words meant that her life was about to change forever. Her younger sister Rachel had betrayed her and there was nothing she could do about it because Rachel was sick. Close to death in the local hospital.

Her past had finally come back to haunt her. Their secret was out and Sonia was scared. She was very different to her little sister and had they not been tied together by the terrible events of that night thirty years ago so was not convinced they would even still be in contact with each other but sometimes we are bound by the secrets we share. The two girls were like chalk and cheese not just physically but in personality too. Rachel was cute, pretty and endearing. She had dark curly hair that fell in ringlets round her rosy cheeks. When she smiled her brown eyes twinkled and two enormous dimples appeared making it hard not to smile back at her. Sonia, by contrast, was tall and gangly. Her limbs didn't seem to belong to her causing her to bump into people and things often resulting in a tongue lashing from their mother for being so clumsy. She was awkward looking with mousy hair and small hazel eyes but it was her long pointy nose that people really noticed. She adopted an aggressive, dominant air to compensate and people were wary of her, including her little sister.

Rachel looked up to Sonia. She was eager to please and worried constantly about falling victim to her sister's vile temper. Sonia in turn enjoyed controlling Rachel and the five year age difference made total dominance easy to achieve. A kind word from Sonia meant everything to the younger girl.

When Sonia became a teenager she was allowed to look after Rachel on her own. Babysitting her little sister mostly passed without incidence. Rachel was happy playing servant to Sonia's 'lady of the manor'. She fetched her drinks and snacks eventually progressing to stealing money and cigarettes from their mothers bag. When they were alone Sonia would swig gin from their mothers bottle leaving Rachel to refill the bottle with water and return it to the top shelf in the larder while Sonia curled in a ball for a drunken doze on the sofa.

The girl's mother was pleased with how well the arrangement was working as it meant that she got to have adult nights out with her husband once again. Eventually she offered for Sonia to look after her friend's little boy too so that the parents could go out as a foursome. This new arrangement annoyed Sonia. Paul was only seven years old and demanding. He ignored Sonia but became besotted with Rachel, wanting her to play with him all the time. It wasn't long before Sonia and Paul started competing for Rachel's attention. Rachel hated the tension finding it increasingly hard to please both tormentors.

Even at his young age Paul knew that secretly smoking and drinking was wrong and he started threatening to tell on Sonia if she didn't let Rachel play with him.

Finally things came to a head. One night, fed up with being ignored and left out he snatched Sonia's stash of contraband and ran out into the garden with it. He was teasing the girls making them chase him round the pond when he accidentally dropped the bottle of gin. It smashed into tiny pieces and Sonia watched the delicious, clear liquid she had come to love so much, soak into the grass lawn. She was furious and started hitting the small boy hard round the head. Rachel looked on wide eyed and terrified while the frenzied attack continued.

Finally Sonia stopped and left Paul laying whimpering and bloodied on the ground. After clearing up the glass Sonia grabbed Rachel by the arm and marched her roughly back to the house where they stayed until the adults returned. The next time they saw Paul was when his father, sobbing uncontrollably, lifted his lifeless body from the pond.

Sonia took control claiming they had put the child to bed and he must have woken up and wandered outside not knowing where he was. The Coroner recorded a verdict of accidental death believing his bruises were consistent with a fall into the water. The boy could not swim. Sonia persuaded Rachel it was best to keep the events of that night a secret and never talk about it again. They stuck to their word until yesterday when she visited her little sister in hospital. Rachel was terminally ill and her dying wish was to be forgiven for any past wrongdoings. She wanted the truth to be known. She wanted to confess and ask for God's pardon.

Sonia had begged and pleaded with her sister to keep their secret even dropping to her knees at one point. Rachel just stroked her hair and implored her to confess too. Looking into her sister's eyes Sonia knew that her past had finally caught up with her. It was time to face the future, alone.