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The Secret Notebook
(Flaking Paint)

by Martin Bourne

Secrets, they're a bugger to keep. But secrets will out as my mother used to say. Now I can keep the big secrets, that's no problem. But it's the periphery. You know, the little bits that surround the biggy. It's like the little bits of maintenance needed on a house. No problem keeping the roof repaired, you can deal with that, but if you slip up and don't notice that bit of flaking paint on a window, then you could be in trouble. Someone says,

"Hang on a minute what about this?"

And you say,

"O, that, well I just overlooked that. It's not important, I'll deal with it later."

But they say,

"No, this house may not be all that it seems."

And before you know it, they're prodding and probing, and other things start to get noticed, that maybe need more investigation, and then they say,

"This house isn't what it seems, you told me it was a good solid house but it's nothing of the sort."

So that's why I keep a secret notebook. I can't trust a computer. No, computers can be left on, or hacked, so my notebook has the secrets and I keep it locked away. Now I know what you're thinking, what secrets?

Names, pet names, dates of birth, schools. Then there's the forensic stuff. Checking clothes for hair, fibre transfers, smells.

It was all so easy in the beginning, before properties were bought, before children, but when you start out, you can't always see your destination.

So it began. A frisson of excitement, I might be exposed, but all the time, the fact that I wasn't found out, made it all the more fun.

Audrey and I hit it off right from the start. We both worked at the local bank. She was a pretty young thing. We started going out, followed by engagement, then marriage, then a son. So, that's all well and good. Then the bank closed, cost cutting they said, and I got a transfer to head office in London. Now, the train services were not good, and we were settled where we were, so I said,

"I think I should get a flat near the office and stay there during the week. I'll save on train fares, I can work longer and get on," so that's what I did.

Jane was a letting agent. I met her a few times looking at different flats, then we had drinks, then dinner, then sex. Well, it's just circumstances, you can't control them can you? Amanda, our daughter came along and there I was living in Jane's flat with Amanda during the week and going home to Godalming at the weekend. And never the twain shall meet. Hence the notebook. Now they say that everyone is very much alike really. But fortunately they don't realise it. But not me, I'm different.

The thing is flaking paint can be anywhere. Twenty years later, both of the kids are at college in London. Different ones obviously and one weekend in walks my son and says,

"Dad, I'd like you to meet my girlfriend Amanda, we met at a party."