

Secrets

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You think I have a secret. No, damn it, you know I have one. You can see it in my eyes.

The thought that I've kept something to myself is driving you mad. You want to know what it is. All you need is opportunity.

You wave me goodbye. The afternoon is yours.

Now's your chance. Go on, do it.

Are you at the hallway yet? Good. Take four or five steps. Look to your right. There, that door is mine. But you know that, don't you? You've walked past it many times. Open it. Did the squeal of the hinge scare you? Did you stifle an alarmed gasp and look around in fear? Did your heart miss a beat?

Step into the room. Look around. What do you see? Nothing? Look again, there has to be something.

Try lying on the floor to see if I've slipped something under the mattress. No? Well it was a bit obvious, wasn't it? Nothing in the bedside tables? Nothing in the dresser? Be careful to put everything back exactly where you found it, that way I won't know you violated my privacy. How clever of you.

Don't give up. You haven't looked in the robe yet. Not such a big job really; I don't have many clothes and am not one for shoes. Check the pockets of my overcoat. What about my dressing gown? I might have slipped my secret in there. No? Too bad.

Look around again. You must have missed something.

No, don't break my piggy bank. Pry the bottom off instead. A

few notes and a lot of tinkling coins. Wasn't really worth the effort, was it? Why not try the photo frame? Take the back off. Oh, how disappointing. Nothing there either. Make sure you wipe any smudges off the glass; I notice little things like that.

Wait. Something has taken your eye. An inlaid wooden box. The one I brought back with me from Morocco. Why didn't you think of that before? You know how much I love that box. Open it, look inside. Be careful, your hands are shaking. Empty. Your frustration is boiling over. Who keeps a trinket box without trinkets? Silly, isn't it? But so like me.

Oh no, you're going to give up again? No stamina, that's your problem.

Put your hand in. Now feel around. Have you found it yet? That small blemish on the bottom that feels like a crack in the wood? Surely it's too clean to be a crack. Press it. No good? Press again. Harder.

Ah, there it is. A false bottom. Of course you expected nothing less. You are, after all, an excellent sleuth. No, don't waste time congratulating yourself, I could be back at any moment.

With a fingernail pry it off the bottom, this very thing you've been searching for. Take it out. Look at it. Turn it over. Read the words on the back. Oh, for heaven's sake, try not to choke. And close your mouth, you look like a dying fish.

Put it back. No, not that way. The other way. That's it, that's the way you found it. Push the false floor down. Did you hear that little click? Perfect. Now close the lid.

And now look what's happened. You have a secret. One you don't want me to know. Are you going to be able to keep this secret to yourself? Or are you, in a moment of guilt, going to throw yourself upon me and beg forgiveness?

What I suggest you do, my dear friend, is wrap your secret tightly around the memory of mine, put them away where no one can find them—maybe not in a trinket box—and never think of them again.

In the meantime, I will move my secret from the hiding place I so unwisely chose. It will never be found again. Not by you, not by anybody.

Look at me.

I know.

It's in your eyes.