



Secret Sisters

By Jayne Ann Krentz

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No one does romantic suspense better than Jayne Ann Krentz. Now, the *New York Times* bestselling author of *Trust No One* and *River Road* delivers a novel that twists and turns into a read that will leave you breathless.

Madeline and Daphne were once as close as sisters—until a secret tore them apart. Now it might take them to their graves.

They knew his name, the man who tried to brutally attack twelve-year-old Madeline in her grandmother's hotel. They thought they knew his fate. He wouldn't be bothering them anymore...ever. Still their lives would never be the same.

Madeline has returned to Washington after her grandmother's mysterious death. And at the old, abandoned hotel—a place she never wanted to see again—a dying man's last words convey a warning: the secrets she and Daphne believed buried forever have been discovered.

Now, after almost two decades, Madeline and Daphne will be reunited in friendship and in fear. Unable to trust the local police, Madeline summons Jack Rayner, the hotel chain's new security expert. Despite the secrets and mysteries that surround him, Jack is the only one she trusts...and wants.

Jack is no good at relationships but he does possess a specific skill set that includes a profoundly intimate understanding of warped and dangerous minds. With the assistance of Jack's brother, Abe, a high-tech magician, the four of them will form an uneasy alliance against a killer who will stop at nothing to hide the truth....

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Editorial Review

Review

Praise for *Secret Sisters*

"A suspenseful, romantic escape."—*People*

"Krentz's focus always is on the relationship between her central characters: Complex, strong-willed and vulnerable, they're at the heart of what might be her best work yet."—*The Seattle Times*

"Fans of best-selling Krentz's books once again hit the literary jackpot with *Secret Sisters* as the doyenne of sophisticated romantic suspense serves up another irresistible combination of sharply etched characters, suspenseful plotting, smoldering sexual chemistry, and wonderfully written dialogue that snaps, crackles, and pops with the author's distinctive wit."—*Booklist*

"A twisting ride on a bullet train of romantic suspense...an adroit tale of old friends, new loves and edge-of-your-seat suspense...So buckle up and expect to lose sleep, because just when you think you've figured it out, *Secret Sisters* will throw you a new curve."—*BookPage*

Praise for Jayne Ann Krentz and her novels

"A joy to read."—*USA Today*

"There's a reason Jayne Ann Krentz sells so many books...[She] continues to exhibit a fine knack for entertaining her readers."—*Fort Worth Star-Telegram*

"Incendiary...evocative."—*The Seattle Times*

"A master of romantic mystery and suspense novels."—*The Columbus Dispatch*

About the Author

Jayne Ann Krentz is the author of more than fifty *New York Times* bestsellers. She has written contemporary romantic suspense novels under that name, as well as futuristic and historical romance novels under the pseudonyms Jayne Castle and Amanda Quick, respectively. There are more than 35 million copies of her books in print.

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Chapter Five

Tom Lomax was dying. Blood and other matter draining from the terrible head wound soaked the threadbare carpet. His thin, wiry body was crumpled at the foot of the grand staircase that once upon a time had graced the lobby of Aurora Point Hotel.

He looked up at Madeline with faded blue eyes glazed with shock and blood loss.

“Maddie? Is that you?”

“It’s me, Tom. You’ve had a bad fall. Lie still.”

“I failed, Maddie. I’m sorry. Edith trusted me to protect you. I failed.”

“It’s all right, Tom.” Madeline held her wadded-up scarf against the terrible gash on Tom’s head. “I’m calling nine-one-one. Help will be here soon.”

“Too late.” Tom struggled to reach out to her with a clawlike hand that had been weathered and scarred from decades of hard physical labor. “Too late.”

The 911 operator was asking for information.

“. . . the nature of your emergency?”

“I’m at the Aurora Point Hotel,” Madeline said, automatically sliding into her executive take-charge tone.

“It’s Tom Lomax, the caretaker. He’s had a bad fall. He needs an ambulance immediately.”

“I’ve got a vehicle on the way,” the operator said. “Is he bleeding?”

“Yes.”

“Try to stop the bleeding by applying pressure.”

Madeline looked at the blood-soaked scarf she was using to try to stanch the flood pouring from the wound.

“What do you think I’m doing?” she said. “Get someone here. Now.”

She tossed the phone down on the floor so that she could apply more pressure to Tom’s injury. But she could feel his life force seeping away. His eyes were almost blank.

“The briefcase,” he whispered.

Another shock wave crashed through her.

“Tom, what about the briefcase?”

“I failed.” Tom closed his eyes. “Sunrise. You always liked my sunrises.”

“Tom, please, tell me about the briefcase.”

But Tom was beyond speech now. He took one more raspy breath and then everything about him stopped. The utter stillness of death settled on him.

Madeline realized that the blood was no longer pouring from the wound. She touched bloody fingertips to Tom’s throat. There was no pulse.

A terrible silence flooded the lost-in-time lobby of the abandoned hotel. She knew that Tom was gone, but she had read that the first responder was supposed to apply chest compressions until the medics arrived. She positioned her hands over his heart.

Somewhere in the echoing gloom a floorboard creaked. She froze, her gaze fixed on the broken length of

balcony railing that lay on the threadbare carpet beside the body. For the first time she noticed the blood and bits of hair clinging to it.

There were probably several scenarios that could explain the blood and hair on the broken railing, but the one that made the most sense was that it had been used to murder Tom.

The floorboards moaned again. As with the blood and hair on the strip of balcony railing, there were a lot of possible explanations for the creaking sounds overhead. But one of them was that Tom had, indeed, been murdered and the killer was still on the scene.

She listened intently, hoping to hear sirens, but the wind was picking up now, cloaking sounds in the distance.

The floorboards overhead groaned again. This time she was almost certain she heard a footstep. Her intuition was screaming at her now.

Instinctively she turned off the phone so that it would not give away her location if the operator called back. She scrambled to her feet.

Somewhere on the floor above, rusty door hinges squeaked. One of the doors that allowed access to the upstairs veranda had just opened.

She looked down at Tom one last time and knew in her heart that there was nothing more she could do for him.

"I'm sorry, Tom," she whispered.

Her car was parked in the wide, circular driveway in front. She slung the strap of her heavy tote over one shoulder and sprinted toward the lobby doors.

The vast, ornate room was drenched in age and gloom. The dusty chandeliers were suspended from the high ceiling like so many dark, frozen waterfalls. The electricity had been cut off eighteen years earlier. When her grandmother had closed the old hotel she had left all the furnishings behind.

Edith had claimed that the heavy, oversized chairs and end tables, the graceful, claw-footed sofas, and the velvet draperies had been custom designed to suit the Victorian-style architecture and would look out of place anywhere else. But Madeline knew that was not the real reason why they hadn't taken any of the furniture with them. The real reason was that neither of them wanted any reminders of the Aurora Point Hotel.

In its heyday at the dawn of the twentieth century, the hotel had been a glamorous destination, attracting the wealthy travelers and vacationers of the era. Her grandmother had tried to revive the ambience and atmosphere of that earlier time, but in the end it had proved too expensive. In the wake of the violent night eighteen years ago, there had been no way to get rid of the property. Selling the Aurora Point Hotel was never an option after that night. There were too many secrets buried on the grounds.

Madeline was halfway across the cavernous space when she saw the shadows shift beneath the rotting velvet curtains that covered one of the bay windows. It could have been a trick of the light caused by the oncoming storm, but she was not about to take a chance. The shadow had looked too much like a partial silhouette of a figure moving very rapidly toward the front doors. It was possible that she had seen the shadow of the killer. The bastard had used the veranda stairs at the back of the building to get down to the ground and was now

moving toward the front lobby entrance to intercept her.

In another moment whoever was out there would come through the lobby doors. She had to assume the worst-case scenario—Tom's killer was hunting her.

Madeline retrieved her keys from her shoulder bag and dropped the tote on the floor. She could hear the muffled thud of running footsteps on the lower veranda now.

She bolted behind the broad staircase and went down a narrow service hall. She had grown up in the Aurora Point. She knew every inch of the place. In the many decades of its existence it had been remodeled and repaired countless times. The gracious, oversized proportions of the public rooms concealed a warren of smaller spaces that made up the back-of-the-house. There was a large kitchen, a commercial-sized pantry, storage rooms, and the laundry.

There was also the back stairs that the staff had used to service the guest rooms.

She summoned up a mental diagram of the layout of the sprawling hotel grounds. It was clear that there was no way to get to her car without being seen by whoever was on the veranda.

She heard the lobby door open just as she emerged from the small, dark hallway into the pantry. The silence that followed iced her nerves. Most people who happened to walk in on a dead body would have made some noise. At the very least they would be calling 911.

So much for the fleeting hope that the intruder might be an innocent transient or a high school kid who had stumbled onto the murder scene and was as scared as she was.

She heard more footsteps—long, deliberate strides. Someone was searching the first floor, looking for her. It would be only a matter of time before she was discovered. If the person stalking her was armed, she would not stand a chance of making it to her car.

She tried to think through a workable strategy. On the positive side, help was on the way. She needed the equivalent of a safe room until the authorities arrived.

She went to the doorway of the pantry and looked out into the big kitchen. The old appliances loomed like dinosaurs in the shadows. Beyond lay the service stairs that led to the guest rooms on the upper floors.

She rushed across the kitchen, not even trying to conceal her movements. Her shoes rang on the old tile floor. She knew her pursuer must have heard her.

Muffled footsteps suddenly pounded across the lobby, heading for the kitchen.

Madeline opened the door of the service staircase and raced up to the next floor, praying that none of the steps gave way beneath her weight.

She reached the first landing, turned, and went down the hall. Most of the room doors were closed. She chose one at the far end of the corridor, opened it, and rushed inside.

Whirling, she slammed the door shut and slid the ancient bolt home. A determined man could kick the door down, but it would take some work.

She could hear the intruder coming up the service stairs. But her pursuer would have to check the rooms one by one to find her.

Heart pounding, her breath tight in her chest, she looked down and was vaguely surprised to see that she was still clutching her phone. She stared at it, oddly numb. Very carefully she switched it on and tapped in the emergency number again. She set the phone on the top of a dusty dresser.

“Don’t hang up again,” the operator said earnestly. “The ambulance and police should be there any minute. Are you all right?”

“No,” Madeline said.

She went to the nearest piece of stout furniture, a heavy armchair, and started to drag it across the room.

“Are you in danger?” the operator demanded.

“Yes,” Madeline said. “I’m upstairs in one of the bedrooms. Someone is coming down the hall. He’ll be here any second. I’ve locked the door but I don’t know how long that will stop him.”

“Push something in front of the door.”

“Great idea,” Madeline gasped. She shoved harder on the heavy chair. “Why didn’t I think of it?”

The big chair seemed to weigh a ton, but it was moving now. She managed to maneuver it in front of the door.

She heard the footsteps stop outside her room. She grabbed her phone and headed toward the French doors that opened onto the veranda.

The storm struck just as she stepped outside. Wind-driven rain lashed at her. But she could hear the sirens in the distance.

She knew the intruder had heard them too because the footsteps were retreating down the hall, heading toward the rear stairs at a run. She knew the killer was headed for the safety of the woods that bordered the rear of the property. She remembered the old service road that wound through the trees.

A short time later she heard a car engine roar to life. The intruder was gone.

She reminded herself that there were not a lot of ways off Cooper Island. A private ferry provided service twice a day. There were also floatplanes and charter boats. The local police might have a shot at catching the killer.

Or not. Most of Cooper Island was undeveloped. A great deal of it was covered in forest. There were plenty of places where a determined murderer could hide until he found a way off the island.

She rushed to meet the emergency vehicles pulling into the drive. Mentally she made a list of what she could—and could not—tell the cops.

She had spent eighteen years keeping secrets. She was good at it.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Paul Cockrell:

This Secret Sisters book is not ordinary book, you have after that it the world is in your hands. The benefit you will get by reading this book is actually information inside this reserve incredible fresh, you will get information which is getting deeper a person read a lot of information you will get. This kind of Secret Sisters without we understand teach the one who reading it become critical in considering and analyzing. Don't always be worry Secret Sisters can bring if you are and not make your handbag space or bookshelves' turn into full because you can have it within your lovely laptop even phone. This Secret Sisters having very good arrangement in word along with layout, so you will not really feel uninterested in reading.

Sarah Winship:

Do you one of people who can't read satisfying if the sentence chained from the straightway, hold on guys that aren't like that. This Secret Sisters book is readable by means of you who hate the straight word style. You will find the details here are arrange for enjoyable looking at experience without leaving also decrease the knowledge that want to provide to you. The writer regarding Secret Sisters content conveys the thought easily to understand by many people. The printed and e-book are not different in the written content but it just different as it. So , do you continue to thinking Secret Sisters is not loveable to be your top record reading book?

Kurt Bohnert:

Reading a book can be one of a lot of pastime that everyone in the world enjoys. Do you like reading book therefore. There are a lot of reasons why people like it. First reading a book will give you a lot of new info. When you read a book you will get new information simply because book is one of a number of ways to share the information or maybe their idea. Second, studying a book will make a person more imaginative. When you reading a book especially hype book the author will bring that you imagine the story how the figures do it anything. Third, you are able to share your knowledge to other individuals. When you read this Secret Sisters, you may tells your family, friends in addition to soon about yours book. Your knowledge can inspire the others, make them reading a reserve.

Edward Davidson:

Secret Sisters can be one of your basic books that are good idea. We all recommend that straight away because this e-book has good vocabulary that will increase your knowledge in terminology, easy to understand, bit entertaining but nonetheless delivering the information. The author giving his/her effort that will put every word into pleasure arrangement in writing Secret Sisters nevertheless doesn't forget the main position, giving the reader the hottest along with based confirm resource information that maybe you can be one among it. This great information can certainly drawn you into brand-new stage of crucial considering.

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