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Chapter One

WHENEVER THERE'S A SECRET anywhere around, I always feel I should try to find out what it's all about. That's the way it was when Roy and I first figured out that Mother and Daddy had a secret they weren't telling us twins.

We didn't think too much about it at first. And for awhile we didn't even notice that every time we walked into the room they would quick-like change the subject, and talk about all sorts of dumb things—like the weather and the garden, and all kinds of other things that they never talked about except when they wanted to change the subject real fast. But when we noticed that they started going into Daddy's study every night at a certain time and closing the door, and sometimes staying there for quite awhile, we both got sort of suspicious.

Finally, we decided it was our duty to find out what was going on. If Mother and Daddy had some secrets, we had better find out what they were all

about. After all, we were a family, weren't we? Shouldn't we get in on whatever stuff was going on in Daddy's study?

"How can we find out what it is?" I asked Roy one day when we were talking about it. "I mean, without coming right out and asking them?"

I knew what would happen if we asked them. They would say that it was something we wouldn't really understand anyway, so we shouldn't worry our little heads about it. Or, if they were in sort of a bad mood, they would tell us not to bother them just then. That was just another way of saying it was none of our business.

Parents are certainly funny that way. If we asked them something, why should they tell us not to worry our little heads about it? We want to worry our little heads if they are going to worry their big heads. We would never have asked them if we didn't. Anyway, it doesn't seem to me that our heads are so little.

I was sitting on the living-room floor, all curled up, reading a book the other day, when Roy came in. He sounded real excited. "I've got it," he exclaimed. "I've finally got it."

I decided I would try to be sort of funny, so I said, "You've got what—chicken pox?"

Roy didn't seem to think that was very funny, so he didn't even laugh.

"I've got a way to find out Mom's and Pop's secret," he said proudly.

Boy! It sure was a good thing that Daddy didn't hear Roy call him "Pop," because he doesn't like

that. One other time when Roy said that, Dad gave him a good scolding and told him that "pop" was not a father, it was something to drink.

"Okay," I said. "How?" I asked it just as though I didn't believe Roy. And really I didn't think he could come up with a good idea, at least not about this.

Roy walked over to the door of Daddy's study.

"You know that microphone and speaker set I got last Christmas?" Roy looked around the room and even out of the door to see if anyone were around. Then he remembered that Daddy was in the church study, and Mother was across the street visiting Grandma Sutton. I guess he didn't want anybody to hear his idea.

"I'm going to string it up right about here," he said, pointing to a spot on the floor.

"What are you going to do that for?" I asked. I guess I always was sort of dumb when it came to figuring out things. At least, that's what Roy always tells me.

"Stupid," he said. I just knew he would call me that. He always does when I don't understand right away what he is talking about.

"We'll turn this on some night, and then we will be able to find out what Mother and Dad are talking about when they go to the study."

Roy looked so pleased with his idea, that I thought I should look pleased too.

"The microphone will be in here," he continued, "and we'll put the speaker up in your room."

I nodded my head just as if I agreed, when all of a sudden I remembered something he had said.

"My room!" I shouted. "How come we're having the speaker in my room? Then if we get caught, I'll get the blame. After all, it was your idea." I guess I talked a little louder than I usually do.

"Okay, okay," Roy answered, trying to quiet me down. He sounded as though he might be just a little bit angry, so I decided that if he said any more about it, I would let him put the speaker in my room, even though I didn't really want it there.

"How long is Mom going to be visiting Gram?" Roy asked.

"How should I know?" I answered him sort of snappy-like. I guess I was still angry about his saying the speaker should be in my room. I knew why Roy wanted to know how long Mom would be gone. He wanted to put the microphone and speaker up now so we could listen to the folks right away tonight, if they talked.

"She will probably be gone for quite awhile," I said. "So we might just as well get to work now." But even while I was talking, I got sort of a funny feeling that the whole thing wasn't exactly right. If Mother and Daddy had wanted us to know what they were talking about, they would have told us. It was almost like sneaking in and opening a Christmas present before Christmas, and then wrapping it up again so nobody would know that you had cheated. Even if nobody saw you do it, it would still be wrong.

There are some things that you know right away

if they are right or wrong. But there are other things that you just sort of get mixed up about, and you are not sure what to do.

When I told Mother that one day, she said that if I would talk it over with the Lord when I got all mixed up, He would help me. But it is the funniest thing—when I am doing some of these things that seem half right and half wrong, I forget all about talking to God. I guess I just think about me.

And that is what happened when we were planning how to put up the microphone and the speaker. I forgot to ask God if it was okay, and I was pretty sure Roy wasn't asking Him either. Because here we were—both of us working as fast as we could, getting different kinds of wires all strung up around the room and under the rug, so Mother and Daddy wouldn't find them.

As soon as we were all done putting the microphone in Dad's study, we went upstairs and put the speaker in Roy's room. He didn't even ask me again if we could put it in my room, and I didn't say anything either. I didn't really want it there.

When we were all done, Roy went down to the study and pretended that he was Dad. He talked just as though Mother were there. I was up in his bedroom listening. I could hear everything real clear most of the time, and then all of a sudden I couldn't hear him talking any more. I thought I heard him walking across the room, and soon I heard the door of Dad's study close. I was right; in just a minute he was up in his room with me.

"Hey," he said, trying to talk and get his breath at the same time, "turn it off; Mom's home."

"Well, then, we should leave it on," I said, not thinking.

"Dummy," Roy retorted. "We don't want it on until tonight when we're supposed to be in bed and they are in there talking."

The way Roy said "supposed to be in bed" sort of bothered me. The more I thought about it, the more it seemed like something awful sneaky and maybe even a little sinful. I know what Daddy would have said if I would have talked to him about it. He would have told me it was my conscience talking to me. But I didn't want to remember what Daddy would have said, and right at this particular minute I didn't even seem to remember that I was a Christian, and that I should try to live like a child who belonged to Jesus. And the main thing I forgot was that God was up in Heaven looking down at what I was doing.

Roy and I could hardly wait for supper to be over. Wouldn't you know it, Daddy had to stay late at the church, and it just seemed as though it took forever to get supper started. When we finally sat down to eat, I had such a funny feeling about what Roy and I had planned that I even forgot to pray. I took my fork and "speared" a hot dog before anyone else even thought of eating.

Daddy looked at me sort of funny; in fact, almost angry-like. I had the feeling that maybe he knew what we were thinking of doing later in the evening.

It sort of made me feel as though I had been "caught in the act."

"Joy!" Daddy said real stern-like. "At this house, we pray before we eat. Or are you new here?"

Boy, I really felt like I had done something wrong then!

Sometimes Daddy prayed such long prayers. And this turned out to be one of those times. He prayed for the church service, the people, all the missionaries, Grandma Sutton, and then finally the food. I felt like I could have used a little food to hold me over Dad's long prayer. In fact, I almost wished I could have managed to get a bite of that wiener before he stopped me, but it was too late for that now.

After prayer, Roy looked up at me and blinked real hard, just as though there was something in both of his eyes. I figured he was trying to tell me to take it easy or we would spill the whole thing and never find out what Daddy's and Mother's secret was.

So I tried to slow down, but when I did I almost choked on my food. Mother looked at me, and in a sort of loud-like voice said, "Joy Sparton, what is your trouble?"

"I ain't got no trouble," I said, and then quickly changed it to, "I don't have a trouble." Mother just hates when we use the word "ain't." I guess that's because she used to be a school teacher, and she never let her kids in school use that word; so, she won't let Roy and me use it either.

As soon as Roy had finished eating, he asked to be excused from the table. When I saw him go I

almost left too, but then I thought of something. In the first place, Mother and Dad might catch on to our scheme, and if both Roy and I were gone, maybe they would sit at the table and talk rather than go into Dad's study. Boy, that would really mess up all our plans! So I stayed.

But I guess I stayed a little bit too long, because quick-like-a-bunny, Mother was clearing the table and handing me a dish towel all at one time. It was times like this when I wished I weren't a girl, because Roy never got stuck with dishes.

I decided that as long as I had to do them, I would work as fast as I could and get it over with. But I guess I hurried a little bit too fast, because just as I was doing the next to the last cup, something happened. I didn't think I really dropped it; I sort of thought that it slipped out of the towel.

'Course Mother would never believe that. Well, anyway, however it happened, I still have to admit that all of a sudden it went ker-plunk right on the kitchen floor. And by the time Mother looked at it, it didn't exactly look like a cup any more. It looked more like a bunch of white chalk pieces.

For a minute I stood there and looked, first at the broken cup, and then up at Mother. At first I was lucky. Whenever I would be looking at the broken cup, she would be looking at me, and when I was looking at Mother, her eyes were looking down on the floor. But that didn't last very long. I knew it couldn't. All at once we both quit looking at the cup and, wham! There we were staring at each other.

“Well,” Mother said. And, boy, she sure didn’t sound very happy! “Don’t just stand there and look at it. Get the broom and get busy and clean it up.” She pointed her finger at the cup on the floor. Well, I don’t exactly mean the cup, but what used to be a cup.

I went to get the broom and the dust pan, and started sweeping the pieces into a pile. But you know me, I always seem to do something that is terrible, terrible wrong. And, boy, this time I did double decker!

While I was trying to bend over to sweep the little pieces into the dust pan, I let the broom handle swing almost any old place it wanted. I didn’t know that Mother was standing right there where the broom handle was flopping, so of course I banged her right in the head. Not very hard, but it hit her all right.

I really felt sorry about hitting my mother, so I decided I would tell her so right away. But do you know what happened then? Something even worse than hitting your mother in the head. When I turned, I whirled a little bit too fast I guess, and I caught the handle of the broom on the cord of the coffee maker. Bang! Down went the coffee maker, cord, broom handle, and all.

And talk about a bang! I tried real hard to catch everything that was falling all over the place, and while I was doing that, I hit my elbow on the corner of the table. Oh, did that ever hurt! It made me let out a terrible scream, just like I was almost dying, or maybe something even worse than that.

For a while I stood there and tried to look at what could have been a broken elbow. But just about the time I was feeling terrible sorry for me, I looked up at Mother. Do you think she was feeling sorry that I hurt my elbow and felt like crying about the whole mess? Oh, no! She just stood there with her hands on her hips, looking at the coffee on the floor. She was probably thinking about how terrible noisy I was, and whether or not I had put a big, old dent in her nice, shiny coffee maker.

At first I got sort of angry. It wasn't really my fault that the cord from the coffee maker was where the broom handle wanted to be. Well, I don't really know if the broom handle wanted to be in the kitchen at all, but with that broken cup on the floor I guess I made it be there. Somehow it didn't seem like the whole thing should be my fault. But the more I thought about it, the more I found out that I couldn't blame anyone else for it.

Of course, Mother could have saved a cup, a bop in the head and a dent in the coffee maker if she had just dried the dishes herself, but mothers don't usually figure out things like that, I guess. At least my mother doesn't.

It was bad enough trying to clean up the broken parts from the cup, but picking up those little coffee grounds was even worse. They were wet and sort of soggy. While I was sitting there on the floor, trying to clean everything up, I started to laugh. Mother looked at me and scowled a little.

"I really don't see anything very funny about all this, Joy," she said sternly.

“I was just thinking if I had worked this right, I could have had the cup and the coffee maker fall at the same time. Then maybe the coffee would have gone into the cup and there you would have your coffee—all poured for you.”

I thought it was a pretty good joke, and laughed like everything, but Mother didn't even smile. She finished scouring the sink and then left me there to finish cleaning up the awful mess I had made.

It was while I was on my knees, picking up little bits of coffee from all over the kitchen floor that I remembered our scheme. Oh, dear! Here Mother and Dad could be in the study talking, and I wouldn't be listening. I hurried real fast to get everything done, and then I dashed out of the kitchen. Just as I came to the swinging door between the two rooms, I bumped smack into Mother.

“And why are you in such a hurry?” she asked. I knew what she was thinking. She thought I had done a sort of careless job in the kitchen, and was beating it to get out of there before she came in to check it over. But even though that wasn't it, I had to march right back with her to prove myself as a good “cleaner-upper.”

When everything was found okay, much to Mother's surprise, I went upstairs. There Roy was, all set for the big event. I sat down on the floor next to him. There we waited and waited and waited.

Now, wasn't that just like parents. Here they had gone to the study and talked real hush-like every night, and then tonight, when we were trying to find out their secret, they weren't even talking.

“Should I turn it off?” Roy asked, pointing to the set.

“I s’po . . . ” I began, and just that minute we heard the door close in Daddy’s study. Mom and Dad had gone in there again. And we were all set to find out their secret.

All at once, I got that funny feeling again. Just like if Someone was telling me that this wasn’t a half right and a half wrong thing. It was all wrong.

I decided that I should listen to the Voice, ’cause it was probably God telling me what to do.

“Roy,” I said as I saw him turning up the volume, “I think we . . .”

“Sh,” he said briskly. “Be quiet. I’ve got it all tuned in.”