

I KNOW YOUR SECRET

PROLOG

THE DOOR to the small apartment on the third floor opened. Entering the room, the intruder quickly closed the door. Clutching a rectangular shaped black leather case in one hand he stood for nearly a minute listening. The only noise he heard came from the old ticking clock hanging off the wall.

The man walked the length of the hallway. His footprints scarcely registering a dent in the long shag pile carpet. He wasn't a tall man. His shadow portrayed this fact when it swept across the newly painted wall. He never made a noise while doing the job. He did only what he got paid to do. After leaving the area he never left any evidence to uncover. Travelling the world for another job didn't pose a problem. He received a phone call three weeks ago outlining this particular job.

Travel to Melbourne Australia; shoot the homicide detective known as Alan James Kendal. When the job's done, leave the country.

The intruder didn't pay any attention nor did his stride falter when he walked past the expensive painting which hung on the wall. He didn't get paid to steal. The man stepped up to the apartment window. Looking past the narrow water trails made from drizzle the night before. The sniper needed to find the exact place his victim will be standing when he pulled the trigger. A lapse of concentration on his behalf must be avoided at all costs.

The ducted heating unit rumbled to life to mask any noise he accidentally made. The leading edge of the stack of papers on the antique mahogany coloured coffee table vibrated in the warming breeze. The man looked to have nerves of steel as he pressed onwards to his goal. Victory seemed a foregone conclusion. He never failed any job he'd been given.

The man crouched at the window sill, viewing the outside world, his eyes lifeless as a shark's. He didn't care for the person he intended to shoot or in the fact, he might be a family man. The motto he lived by was easy to remember. Never ask questions. Do exactly what you were paid to do, nothing more; nothing less.

The sniper opened the black leather case, viewing the contents as if they were a long lost love he'd spent months searching for. He gently stroked the weapon lying in the dark blue velvet cloth. Taking the pieces from the box he expertly built the expensive rifle. He pulled three bullets from his top pocket, lifting the first one up to eye level. Twisting the bullet between his thumb and forefinger he made full use of the light shining through the window to detect any flaws in the bullet's structure. He grunted a whisper before placing the bullet back into his pocket. He scrutinized the second bullet the same way. It twisted more perfectly than the first so he loaded it into the rifle's chamber.

Using a glass cutter the man cut a neat round hole the size of a saucer in the double glazed window. He placed a white square handkerchief on the carpet and wrapped the round glass fragment. He stowed the fragile parcel in a compartment in the case. Lifting his rifle he pushed the barrel through the hole.

Looking through the telescopic sight the sniper focused on a child skipping next her mother, going about their daily errands totally unaware they were being watched. Pointing the gun to his left the sniper stared at the media congregating in a group drinking coffee out of paper mugs. They were waiting for the detective to step from the courthouse. The traffic still seemed light seeing how the peak hour rush must be imminent. Eventually, a small delivery truck rumbled past, followed by a police car and a woman on a motorbike.

The sniper re-checked his watch before sitting back on his knees to wait.

The courthouse across the soon-to-be busy street erupted, spewing people when someone shouldered the main door. The media and the police were too busy watching the man wearing a long black duffel coat to notice the end of the rifle. The sniper zeroed his gaze onto the anchorwomen from the media jostling into position in front of a bouquet of microphones.

The sniper wore a poker face. Looking through the telescopic sight the man continued his wait. He spied his target standing in the entrance of the courthouse. The detective appeared to be staring at the throng of people waiting for him to step up to the microphones. When he did, it'll be the perfect time in which to pull the trigger.

Walking from the courthouse, Detective Alan Kendal, waved at the crowd. His long black duffel coat flapped lazily when he descended the twelve stairs to the plateau above the footpath.

The sniper made himself more comfortable by spreading his weight evenly on both knees. He watched the cop straighten his tie before stepping up to the microphones, wearing a widening grin.

The sniper re-focused the gun sight for a clearer view, zeroing in on his target down to the millimeter. He'd wait patiently for the precise moment when the cop looked completely vulnerable. When the time came he'd strike, never giving the act a second thought.

The sniper's index finger slid over the gun's trigger, constricting slightly. A nerve twitched under his eye; however his trigger finger remained unshakable.

The crowd fidgeted slightly waiting for the Detective to speak. The sniper noted the cop looked relaxed. The hit man applied more pressure to the trigger. Someone directly in front of Kendal asked a question.

The sniper inhaled. The oxygen seemed to relax him further. He focused on the exact spot where he intended the bullet to penetrate flesh. Kendal shifted his body towards the woman.

The time felt right.

Detective Kendal signaled the woman to repeat her question.

The sniper exhaled before squeezing off one round. He only ever needed one bullet; never two.

A flash erupted from the gun followed by a muffled pop.

The victim spun in tight circles. He went down, hitting the concrete hard. Women screamed. Men yelled. The crowd ran like ants in every direction totally confused in which way to go. How easy could it be to shoot another dozen or two?

The sniper didn't hesitate longer than he should. He retracted the rifle from the window. In seconds he'd packed his kit away in the black rectangular leather case. He walked across the carpet again, opening and shutting the front door. He marched into the lift. Reaching out he turned the maintenance key which enabled the lift doors to close. He didn't intend to go down to mingle amongst the mayhem. The man planned to go to the roof where an almost invisible steel cable had been strung from building to building.

Hearing the noise of keys being poked on a keyboard coming from the next room the sniper froze. Could he have been seen while at the window? His mind raced at trying to think up what to do. He certainly didn't want to view the world from a prison cell. The man bit his bottom lip in a show of nervousness. Placing the black case on the floor of the lift he silently pulled his knife from its sheath hidden under his arm. Before stepping from the lift he switched the lift maintenance key to the off position. Closing the gap to the noise he slid along the wall.

The writer's fingers swept the keyboard. The words flowed fast across the monitor. The noise of bone stabbing the keys grew louder. The sniper found the front door to the room open wide enough to see most of the interior of the room. How easily could he sneak inside the room walk up to the person sitting at the computer keyboard finish his life and be back inside the lift in ten to fifteen seconds. The author will never know his fate.

The writer's shoulders stooped closer to the keyboard. Her fingers hit each key before moving to the next at a blistering pace. Faster and faster the writer forced her fingers to move. Sweat formed on her brow from sheer concentration. She seemed totally oblivious to the shadow on the wall staring at her back. The sniper smirked at the realization any noise he made will go unheard.

Too many chapters of the author's first book were re-written. The cursor started the last page pushing the writer's name (Myriad Jones) to the next line as it raced towards the finish. Victory looked to be in the writer's grasp. Poking the keys her fingers were now a blur. The words formed quickly on the monitor. No hesitation. This will be her masterpiece. The woman finally conquered the dreaded writer's block. The author ploughed on. The winning ribbon was close. The smell of victory hovered above her head like a crown; the one she couldn't wait to wear.

The overhead incandescent light globe picked out the cold sharp blade of the knife when the sniper lifted it high in the air. The marriage between the warm globe and the blade could never be.

The sniper's breathing deepened. He looked to be in complete control. Wild shadows danced on the wall behind the writer who kept increasing the speed she poked the keys, totally unaware she'd reached the last few seconds of her life. She'll never live long enough to hear how well her masterpiece sold.

Her final few breaths were unguarded.

The knife came down, again and again, cutting flesh and snapping bone.