

I AM THE SECRET KEEPER

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This is a beautifully written story using simple but effective dialogue, told through the eyes of a teddy bear about his role as friend, confider, comforter and companion for two generations of a family. Anyone who's ever had a teddy, or whose children have, will relate to this delightful tale. ADJUDICATOR

I AM THE secret keeper; I am the observer of wishes.

The tissue paper that surrounded me rustled like a silk skirt in motion as the lid was lifted from my box. The light grew stronger as the paper was folded back, a hand gently exposing me to the world and releasing me from my parcel. The room was almost silent, the Grandfather clock ticked stoically in the corner, giving me a welcome wink.

"What is it?" a soft female voice, gently curious.

"It's something furry", curious also, but deeper and definitely male.

"Oh look, it's a bear"

"What a strange gift for a newborn"

A tangle of voices met my ears as I was lifted from the box and held above for everyone to see. Two adults looked me over from the tips of my fuzzy caramel ears down to my plum velvet paws. They worked my joints and posed me in sitting position, smiling as the warmth from their hands recharged my sleepy body. I looked around careful not to move too much, taking in the beautiful blue room with the large window and the happy faces. Their eyes met and then looked towards the bassinet to the side of the floral chintz sofa.

"She's too little to play with it, shall we put it away?"

"No, it's too nice to put away, let's see what Colette thinks, it is her gift after all"

My liberator lifted and placed me inside the crib, perched at the foot. The

blanket began to wriggle; its smooth hillside quaked, knocking me so that I was lying directly beside the sleeping infant. Her eyes were closed, long dark lashes sweeping up over perfect pale cheeks. I gazed in awe at my new companion, vowing to stay by her side.

Our alliance from that day on was a strong one. Colette grew, from baby to toddler and toddler to child.

"Mama, where's Bear? Mama, Mama, please, I can't sleep without Bear, where's Bear?"

"It's ok, wait a moment, ah he's fallen under your bed, shhh, I'll get him, and it's ok. Did you have a bad dream?"

Mama laid me in Colette's arms and she hugged me tight, her nightdress sticking damply to her. Her heart was jumping in her chest almost trying to escape so I snuggled in deeper to soothe her. Her Mama smoothed her forehead and kissed it as she manoeuvred her back into sleeping position, rearranging the blankets back in order again.

"I'm ok now Mama, I have Bear, go back to bed"

Colette whispered in my ear, her eyes closed tight.

"I dreamt I was lost in a forest and darkness was coming".

I squeezed her with my paws back as hard as I dared. No words were needed as she soon settled, her heart beat steady and calm, as she drifted off to sleep.

"Those girls in school are so mean, they won't let me play with them and

they call me names"

She had thrown her school bag on the floor and fat tears splashed on the pillow as she lay on her bed with me in the crook of her arm.

"I wish I had long blonde hair like Suzy, so pretty compared to my drab mousey mess"

"Bear, come play with me, I'm lonely"

So I would listen and offer no advice other than to tilt my head as my joints had become loose from loving. I was the perfect confidante, loyal and trustworthy. Whispered dreams and wishes filled me up and nourished me and I kept them safe and secure.

"Bear, I've met a boy I like"

Colette moved me from her pillow to the end of her bed. She spent more time in her room, but less time playing with me. I moved to the dresser, seated importantly in front of the mirror so that I was the first and last thing she saw every day, as she curled her hair and gazed at her reflection.

"Bear, you are getting all dusty. Maybe I should keep you safe"

Rustling of tissue heralded the return of the box.

Time passed. I'm a patient bear.

Movement again.

The tissue paper that surrounded me rustled like a silk skirt in motion as the lid was lifted from my box.

"What a strange gift for a newborn!"

