

The Promise



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Jude Goss

“You weren’t there the night He found me. You did not feel what I felt when He wrapped His loving arms around me...”

~from *Alabaster Box*

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PROLOGUE

Not much withstands 2000 years...even the Pyramids will be dust before this world is through. The permanence of man and his rhetoric is questionable at best, but the words of One are for Eternity. These words are the foundation to build a life around, hold tightly in our heart, and were never meant to be extrapolated on, replaced, or ignored. Yet the concrete nature and desires of man pull at this simplistic tenet because we place our worth in tangible things.

How can we cling to the words of One unseen, discarnate, sacrificed for a nobler purpose? The world screams loudly of the fallacy of this premise and urges us to put stock in worldly things: power, money, titles, huge houses, expensive cars, precious jewels...

So, the choice we must all make is: ignore all the things of this world for an eternity spoken of thousands of years ago or grab our share of this tangible world and leave eternity to the theologians. Such a dubious gamble, such disparate outcomes, and all emanating from the birth of a baby whose cries touched a mother's heart and brought the world to His feet.

Many say that thirty-three years is not nearly enough to impact the world...but One says, "I gave everything including My most precious possession that you would know what Eternity holds for you" if only you believe

"The Promise."

CHAPTER 1

Kellin stood on the porch looking very much like that lamb heading to the slaughter house, because that is mostly how she felt. It was bad enough that the house was a derelict mess, but the word about town was that it was haunted. There were entirely too many stories told and retold about events which had taken place on the grounds or in the house of Gregor Manor, and this gave Kellin no comfort level about entering the mansion alone.

She had visions of the policeman who would come to her door one day along with the missing person's report and find the body...her body...and that would justifiably add to the horrid tales already in circulation. So, with much trepidation and a hesitation that had reached near paralysis she stepped over the threshold.

Well...she survived and noted nothing in particular that was unusual, so Kellin began to breathe again. It was definitely musty and in much need of repairs. Neglect had been a way of life for Gregor Manor for scores of years; she could do something to improve this situation, she was certain of that.

Kellin noticed the antiquity of her surroundings and marveled at the ancient carpentry, it was truly artistry in wood. As she made her way through the front room, into the dining room, then the kitchen, and finally into the many bedrooms, a great sense of tranquility bathed her in calm reassurance; maybe it wasn't haunted after all.

The house was ample, certainly a tribute to the original owners who reportedly were quite wealthy and ensconced on the top of the societal ladder in this town. Everybody knew or knew of the Gregors. They had made their mark in the history of this town and so it was with pride that Kellin admired the still-intact ornate tiles encircling each bathroom. The woodworking was extensive, ornate, and represented nearly every tree known on the earth. The colors of the wood varied from the deepest ebony to the palest ash. What kind of amazing wealth the Gregor family must have amassed to have filled this mansion with the amazing and unexpected from all over the world!

As Kellin would later discover at the local library, the Gregor clan hailed originally from Scotland and had grown rich after migrating to America. They had numerous factories that employed the majority of the town. They provided much-needed iron and steel to a growing country and the demand increased with each year they were in business. They were a very generous family and treated their employees like family. Each holiday they served up a feast with bonuses and gifts for everyone present, including even the extended family members of employees.

The Gregors were a large clan with the original family producing eight children and each of those children with the exception of Declan—who had died during his birth-- produced almost an equal number of offspring. They were very loyal to their church and were said to have built it with money from the sale of the metal beams and smaller building pieces they produced. The pastor gladly accommodated their whims since they built his church and supplied his generous salary.

As Kellin read day after day about the history contained in the walls of her newly inherited home she began to relax in the

night when she would finally fall asleep. Initially she lay awake listening for intruders from the next world, but when none came she slowly found restful sleep and soon she began to think this inheritance was a blessing after all...just maybe.

It was after several weeks when she finally found the courage to climb the spiral staircase to the attic and upon entering awakened anew her hesitancy and feelings that she was being watched...she couldn't seem to shake the foreboding feelings that permeated her entire being. Could the rumors be true?

CHAPTER 2

Jamie tore apart his room and then his house and finally panic started to set in. The panic started in his heart and worked itself in all directions until it encompassed his entire body. After all he had spent the last two years saving for this and now it was gone. Every extra dollar had been saved and sacrificed, because he was not one to start out a new life in debt. He was sensible, everyone in town knew that. But now, his logical sensibility produced results that had seemingly evaporated into thin air... where in town could it be?

Two years to purchase the perfect ring...and now it was missing. How could he ever ask Evie to marry him without a ring? Surely it would show up. Had he put it in a pocket? No, he was certain he had replaced it every night on the nightstand and returned it to its perfect little velvet blue box with the gold lettering, but today it had grown feet and marched into oblivion. He was a creature of habit...these things just didn't happen to him. What would he do now?

Christmas was coming and his proposal was planned down to each perfectly selected word. He could never afford another ring and a fake diamond in a metal ring would never do. Evie was everything he had ever wanted. She was the one he wanted to have his many children with: she was beautiful, she was intelligent, and she was "the one"! Never had he been so enamored of any woman. They hardly even distracted him from his work in the past.

When he first spotted Evie walking into Parson's Drugstore while picking up his weekly supplies, his heart danced a tune he

did not know. She was purely angelic as she skipped up to the counter and ordered a chocolate malted. He had wanted to sit down and join her but a proper introduction would be the only acceptable way. He was a proper lad and his training deemed you get an introduction to such a fine young lady as this.

He didn't know on that first sighting that Evie was the oldest daughter of the wealthiest family in town and that she was destined to wed the son of the second wealthiest family. This is how it was done and would always be done for many generations past the time when Jamie would leave this earth. Regardless, he had seen his future and it had Evie in it. No other woman would be an acceptable substitute now.

Unfortunately, he had lost the entire savings of his last two years in the form of a ring with a very acceptable diamond at its center and two smaller lemon-colored stones on either flank. The two smaller stones were just the color of Evie's hair and Jamie considered them a perfect compliment to the beauty of his beloved Evie. But what solution could possibly redeem him now? Jamie realized that short of removing everything in his room and his house, that he was doomed. As Christmas galloped closer and closer, his dilemma showed no hint of resolution and no solution presented itself either.

Jamie was a good man, if not a wealthy one. Since his birth he had not traveled further than the bordering town. Unfortunately, his widowed mother, Ruth, was sickly and he had had to become the man of the house even before even his schooling was complete. But, his mother would not allow him to neglect his education and every night after he returned home from delivering papers and selling all manner of goods on the streets, Ruth read to him and he reciprocated.

Ruth required her only child to read, do rudimentary mathematics, learn history, and even recite the poetry of the great poets. Ruth spent many a weekend with Jamie scouring the library for information so her son wouldn't miss out on the basics of a good education. And when Ruth finally passed on to the next world, Jamie was a fine young man who could hold his own in proper company and speak eloquently to those so lucky to be educated abroad at the finest colleges. Jamie had grown into a man of great substance and character.

Yet, he couldn't find any math equation that would allow him to acquire another ring with his meager wages within the next three weeks timeframe of his Christmas deadline. He was beginning to lose hope and his spirit was burdened with the realization that he would have to stand before Evie, ask her the most important question of both their young lives naked without a ring, and pray that he was enough man for her...the daughter of the wealthiest philanthropist in town. How could he summon the courage to do this?

Jamie began to think about the probability that his Christmas proposal might not come into being and his heart beat more slowly and his soul sank into the sadness of loss and disappointment. He was drowning in sorrow because the future he had envisioned was thrown to the fates and the pieces of happiness he had held so tightly in his heart scattered the earth with a promise broken and what "might have been". He was a defeated man Ruth would not have recognized.

CHAPTER 3

Following a long day writing her column at the paper, Kellin retreated to her new home at Gregor Manor and a bath. The plumbing pipes of Gregor Manor were old and the rust inside them sent the shower water out in the palest shade of red. It was eerie the first time she took a shower, but after the plumber explained the situation, Kellin accepted the reality of this now broken-down palace. The heating clanged and groaned as she turned it to the “on” position each night. It was old, but it was one hundred percent hers, so she would not complain.

Something deep inside Kellin was beginning to grow a fondness for the rust-laden water and the noisy heater. It all began when she pushed the attic door up and entered a world where time had stopped. She was startled at first but soon the amazing contents held in this musty prison—likely for decades—had her rushing home from work each night, hurrying through an obligatory dinner, and retiring to her attic museum and into a world found only in the most vivid of imaginations.

Inside the attic was the history of the Gregor family in all their pomp and glory! Surely, someone must have known what was left behind? But, why hadn’t someone laid claim to the numerous boxes filled with the likes of which usually inhabited historical museums? It was a mystery, not unlike the one that had brought Gregor manor into her possession in the first place. Surely, both could fill the pages of most fairy tales!

Slowly and methodically Kellin opened the boxes to find treasures that she had seen only in books, and as she removed and examined the articles it became clear how very wealthy

the Gregors were. Not only were the contents rare, but they were intricately wrapped in multiple layers of tissue and fancy materials like silk or velvet. Had the family known how long they would lie entombed until this chance discovery by Kellin? It was all such a mystery...

Nothing made much sense and surely the great aunt who had married into the Gregor clan and willed Kellin her residence at her death was an equally puzzling circumstance. Of course this aunt never had children of her own and Kellin was alone after the death of her mother, but to receive such a gift was beyond her youthful comprehension. Originally though she had tried to sell the house and couldn't, she was grateful now because of the unexpected treasures in this enormous attic.

Kellin knew it would take the better part of a year to unwrap and categorize the hundreds of articles held captive in the attic. She was more than willing to take her time, after all she was young, unmarried and her job was just that: a job. The career she had envisioned hadn't yet materialized, so Kellin made the attic unveiling her "career" and just maybe it would lead to something more amazing than she had originally anticipated.

As Kellin probed deeper into the Gregor family history she realized that this was a treasure of immense proportions and it deserved her time and attention. Men, her career, friends, and her life could just wait...this was far too exciting to waste time on superfluous activities and distractions. And this was even before she made her greatest discovery of all!

When she finally counted the boxes and piles of goods, the number three hundred seventeen tally was just mind-boggling. She decided to give herself a minimum of a year to unwrap, record, and photograph all of the contents. She had resigned

her position at the newspaper and now she had no plans... maybe the house's contents were what would be sold and not the house? How interesting that the house was worth so very little in its dilapidated condition but its attic contents might make her a very wealthy woman?

Life had always been an adventure to Kellin and this was just more of what she craved. So, with each day as she opened the boxes she traveled back through the pages of history and relived the past through the contents of a family who had purchased items most people only lust after. Each discovery was like going on an archaeological dig and it seemed as if each new discovery surpassed the last in antiquity and monetary value. Kellin was no expert, but even this fledgling explorer knew a Faberge egg when she laid eyes on it!

Still, with the past surrounding her, Kellin felt the odd presence of something. It wasn't like when your neck hair rises and heightens ones senses...this was a calming presence, but a presence nonetheless. Was a long-dead relative standing guard over his or her possessions? Would some policeman find her cold dead body strangled as she first envisioned—with no reasonable explanation—in the bowels of a house watched over by vindictive ghosts?

Each day Kellin calmly unwrapped the possessions of her dead aunt's family, and then her curiosity would have her visiting the local library and delving more deeply into the history of the Gregor family and what she had uncovered that day. Surely there was an explanation for the presents she encountered when she held her own private Christmas party each night in the attic. She would find out more very soon...

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