

Arsenic and Victoria 's Secret

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ents and people portrayed in this story are fictional and any resemblance to actual events and/or people is purely coincidental.

Acknowledgement

y is for my dear friend Karen who wanted to get me out of my writing slump and gave me this title then challenged me to write a story.

The woman, dressed in black from head to toe, stood at her bedroom window and watched as people came to her home.

"Looks like the entire town will be here for the visitation and funeral."

"Everybody loved Sam," the woman's mother said soothingly.

"They didn't have to live with him Mother."

"Shh, Victoria someone will hear you."

The woman turned, her blue eyes flashing with hatred for the man laid out in the parlor downstairs. "He was a cruel, evil man and I am glad he's dead. Those people don't have the scars from the torture that man put me through...if only they knew the truth." The vehemence of the words echoed throughout the room.

There was a soft knock on the door before it opened.

"Victoria, people are asking for you." The gently spoken words held nothing but love and compassion. "Why don't you come downstairs with me?" Janie Dawson, Victoria's long time friend smiled fondly towards her.

Victoria's anger abated as she smiled affectionately at the woman standing in the doorway. "Thanks Janie I will be down shortly." She then turned back towards her mother. "Are you coming with me?"

"Darling, this is not the time to air your dirty laundry. Sam is gone and it is time for you to honor his memory."

"No! I will never do that."

Her mother rose from her chair, went to her daughter and took her in her arms. "You will do what you must. No one must question your love or devotion for your husband." She stepped back and looked directly into her daughter's eyes. "You understand that don't you?"

"Yes," Victoria said quietly. "I will be the perfect grieving wife."

The room became hushed as Victoria entered with her head held high with the appropriate look of grief upon her face. Her mother was by her side until Janie stopped her.

"She needs to go alone," Janie said quietly. "It will look better that way."

The older woman shook her head knowingly. "Yes, you are right." She then glanced around the room full of people. "Are they all here?"

"All but one. He will show I'm sure of that." Janie's eyes then focused on her friend as she approached the body.

Victoria stood beside the coffin where Sam's huge body lay and looked down upon the man. How she hated him for all the abuse she had taken from him in the last five years. However, she loathed him, most of all, for taking away her happiness and dreams. If it had not been for Janie she probably would have been committed to a loney bin somewhere along the line. She could feel the eyes of everyone in the room upon her and knew she must act like the ultimate anguished widow. She dabbed her eyes with a lace handkerchief her mother had given her and then moved away.

She closed her moist eyes briefly before she spoke with heartfelt tenderness to those gathered there. "I want to thank you all for

coming to honor my husband, Sam." Her voice quavered as more tears cascaded down her cheeks.

Ruth, Victoria's mother, made her way towards her daughter then wrapped a supportive arm around her waist. "It's okay Darling, we all know how much you cared for him."

Victoria lightly wiped away the tears and thinly smiled apologetically to everyone. "I'm sorry I just can't speak anymore."

After a few moments of awkward silence, various people approached her to offer her their condolences.

Reverend Andrews took her small hand in his. "He is with God now."

No way is he in heaven. Sam's soul is burning in hell.

"May I call on you later in the week?" the Reverend asked compassionately.

Blue eyes held the man for a moment before they lowered. "I will look forward to it Reverend. Thank you for your kind words about my dear Sam."

Moving among the mourners Victoria's face looked devastated.

"Victoria, my dear I am so sorry for your loss whatever will you do?" Maude Blanchard asked.

"Thank you Maude. I am not sure what will happen to me or my mother now."

Maude patted her arm. "Don't worry dear it is after all eighteen ninety two and we know how to take care of our own."

Victoria's eyes scanned the room full of people until they rested on Annabel Blowhart the town slut who shamelessly was Sam's lover. The affair was one of those things that everyone knew and whispered about but for some reason they all overlooked. The biggest mystery was why the town's folks seemingly held Sam in high regard.

She moved through the crowd towards her target stopping briefly to acknowledge offers of sympathy and thank others for coming. Finally, she arrived at the side of the woman who had known her husband intimately.

Clearing her throat she spoke, "Miss Blowhart I see you are enjoying my almond cookies."

The woman was shocked that the widow of her lover would approach her. "Why Mrs. Fankin...I...I um, really love them. They were a favorite of Sa...I mean your husband weren't they?"

Victoria smiled slyly. "Why yes they were. Since you seem to enjoy them so much why don't I send you a few everyday?"

Annabel was shocked. "Oh, you don't have to do that."

"I insist. After all it is the least I can do." *You deserve everything that Sam did*, she smiled inwardly with the thought.

Victoria picked up the plate of cookies and walked away towards J.D. Hamilton, Sam's closest friend and the town's lawyer. The man was evil personified and would lie, cheat or steal to get what he wanted.

"JD, thank you so much for coming," Victoria's voice was soft with the proper amount of grief. She was the perfect grieving widow who seemingly had lost her reason for living...her husband.

The lawyer awkwardly kissed the woman's cheek. "Miss Victoria it is such a sad day. Sam will be missed. We didn't have him with us long enough."

"No we didn't. He is...no was," an errant tear coursed down her cheek, "still young and in the prime of his life. I don't know how I will go on without him." She lowered her head feigning heartache while lightly touching her eyes with the moist cloth in her hand.

"Now, now don't you worry your pretty little head you will be well taken care of I will see to that. After all, you now own a considerable

part of this town. I will look after all of your affairs just as I did for Sam."

Yeah, by forging my signature and stealing my money. Victoria raised her head and sighed deeply. "Oh, thank you so much JD I am so grateful for your help." She then lifted the plate of cookies. "Would you care of one of my special almond cookies?"

The man's eyes lit up. "Ah, your almond cookies, Sam used to rave about them." He took one and brought it to his lips. After savoring the tender morsel that seemed to melt in his mouth, he smiled. "I can see why he loved them they are heavenly."

"I'm glad you like them. Please let me send you some everyday as my way of thanking you for everything."

"That won't be necessary I am glad to help you out in anyway I can."

Help yourself to my property is more like it, Victoria thought. "No, please allow me. I will just send you one or two a day. Please, JD let me do this in Sam's memory."

The smarmy man smiled. "Of course."

Victoria touched the man's hand gently. "Promise me you will eat them each day. If I know you are doing that it will be as if Sam has never left me. Please." Her quavering voice was filled with the desperation and neediness she knew the idiot man would respond.

"Miss Victoria, it would be my pleasure to honor Sam's memory in that way. Besides, I will have a delicious cookie too."

"Thank you," she said gratefully. Then she deposited the plate of cookies on a nearby table before making her way across the room.

Her eyes fell on Janie Dawson who seemed to be in deep conversation with the editor of the town's newspaper Vladimir Marron. Anger flared in Victoria as she remembered the portly reporter as he stood in almost the exact place in her home and watched as Sam savagely

beat her. Vladimir's only comment was *it is a husband's prerogative to punish his wife as he sees fit.*

"Hello Mr. Marron, thank you for coming."

"My dear Mrs. Fankin, I am so very sorry for your loss. Sam was taken from us much too soon. It was so unexpected."

"Thank you," she said with a voice that seemed choked up with grief. "I couldn't believe it when I found him slumped over like that...it was such a shock."

"We will all miss him," Janie added. " Victoria did you see the lovely article Vladimir wrote about Sam?"

How Victoria loved Janie. "Why yes I did. Thank you so much Mr. Marron for your kind words." She then looked at the cookie in his hand. "I see you like my cookies."

"Miss Victoria these are undoubtedly the best cookies I have ever eaten. They just seem to melt in my mouth."

A small feral smile crossed Victoria's face. "Please let me send you some everyday as a thank you for your kindness towards my husband and me."

Vladimir beamed. "Why thank you I would like that very much. I will have to watch how many I eat or I will get a big as a house."

"Don't you worry about that, I will send you only two a day. How would that be?"

"Mrs. Fankin you are such a wonderful lady. Thank you."

"You are most welcome I am glad to be able to do it for you I know that Sam held you in high esteem." She then smiled. "Please excuse me Mr. Marron there is someone I'd like Janie to meet."

The two women walked away each slyly eyeing the other. Suddenly, Victoria brought her hands to her face apparently overcome with

grief. Instantly Janie put her arm around her friend's shoulders in a comforting gesture. She then turned her head and whispered into Victoria's ear, "Brilliant move my love."

"Oh, Janie whatever will I do," Victoria sobbed rather loudly.

The entire room of mourners stopped their chatter and looked at the two women. One was comforting the other who wailed in sorrow. *How wonderful for Victoria to have such a good friend* they all thought.

Victoria's hands fell from her face and she looked at the room full of people staring in her direction. "Please everyone, forgive me...it is just so hard to believe he is gone." She attempted to wipe the tears streaking down her cheeks away with the lace cloth in her hand but she was shaking so badly it was difficult.

Janie pulled Victoria closer and again whispered in her ear. "Nice touch. Two more...I see the banker has arrived shall we offer him a cookie?"

Victoria could feel the smile on her friend's face as Janie's breathe touched her ear. "Thank you for being here for me Janie you're such a good friend." Her voice was loud enough for all to hear. "I am fine now," she said a bit quieter and moved away from Janie's embrace.

Her feet carried her past the table where she had deposited the plate of cookies. She stopped and picked it up before approaching the owner of the town's bank, Elijah Downey.

Elijah was not one for mincing words and didn't think there was any time that it was inappropriate to speak of business. With his largest depositor gone, he had to make sure that Victoria would not change anything. When he saw her approaching, he moved towards her and spoke first.

"Miss Victoria, how are you holding up? Sam's death was such a shock to us all."

"Thank you so much Mr. Downey." She bowed her head in an effort to hide her dislike for the man.

"Sam was a good man."

And, an even better customer. "Yes he was," she sobbed while casting a look towards the coffin.

"If there is anything the bank or I can do for you please don't hesitate to ask. I am here to meet all your needs." His beady rat-like eyes leered at her before he bent in to kiss her cheek.

Victoria was repulsed by the man and pulled away. "Thank you," she managed to say while she cringed inside. She then remembered the cookies and held the plate out. "Mr. Downey, would you like one of my special almond cookies?"

The man's pudgy greedy fingers took three cookies. "I have heard Sam speak of them but have never had the pleasure." He stuffed one in his mouth. "Oh, my," he said as cookie crumbs spit out of his mouth, "they are superb."

"Would you like me to send you a few everyday?"

Not one to pass up anything free he readily agreed. "Oh that would be fantastic."

Victoria smiled sweetly and nodded her head. "Then expect a delivery daily."

One more, Victoria thought as she scanned the room for Jackie Bentley the man who ran Sam's store the Fankinville Mercantile. Once she located him, she headed his way with the plate in hand.

Of all Sam's acquaintances, she liked Jackie the most. He was a kind gentle person who would always smile at her whenever she entered the store. Unfortunately, for the man, he too stood by silently while Sam abused and humiliated her. In fact, he even defended Sam on the rare occasion when Victoria unsuccessfully tried to fight back.

"Hello Jackie, thank you for coming today."

"Mrs. Fankin will you please accept my deepest sympathy at your loss?" The man's quiet sincere manner had Victoria considering not making her next move.

"Are those your famous almond cookies?" Jackie asked. His eyes lit up as he reached for a tasty treat.

Guess you have sealed your fate. "Why yes they are. I do remember Sam would always share one with you when I brought them by for him. Please help yourself. In fact, I think I will make it a point to bring you several everyday. Maybe even a plateful on Sundays. Would you like that Jackie?"

He gratefully accepted. "Oh, yes thank you. You are a lovely lady Miss Victoria."

For a moment, she felt sad for the man, but only for a moment. Her mind flashed back to how humiliated she felt when Jackie chastised her for hitting Sam. *Wives never hit their husbands. It is their duty to do as they are told. You must be grateful for all that he provides for you.* He deserved no mercy from her.

Six months later the town's Doctor, Lynwood Martin was puzzled by Annabel Blowhart's symptoms. She had been vomiting for days and he was unable to alleviate her suffering. Everything else about her seemed normal except for severe stomach pains, which seemed to shatter her body continually. He doubted that the conditions surrounding her profession were particularly clean and speculated she could have almost any disease. She would expire soon and he was helpless to stop it.

He pondered the fact that over the last several months three of the town's prominent citizens had all passed away. He didn't think any of it was related just an odd coincidence *but still what are the chances of that happening.* Fankinville had been a relatively small town before gold was discovered five months earlier in a nearby mine. Now the town was growing and along with that, many unsavory characters. *Who*

knows what that element might have brought with them to our town? Oh, to have our town back the way it was before those miners came. Guess nothing would surprise me anymore, he thought. Then he recalled that four months earlier Jackie Bentley, the small man who worked at the mercantile, had visited his office the day before he died. Lynwood recalled Jackie had also complained of severe stomach pains but he had diarrhea and not vomiting. I wonder if he was a client of Annabel's that might be the connection .

He returned to his patient to ask her if she knew Jackie, but found her lying very still with the look of intense pain still etched upon her face. He took her hand and felt for a pulse before he rested his ear against her chest listening for a heartbeat. There was none. "That makes five patients I have lost recently," he said quietly as he reached up and closed Annabel's eyes. *If this continues, the town will be looking for another doctor.* He covered the body with a sheet and left his office in search of the town's mortician, Silas Griever.

There were few mourners at Annabel Blowhart's funeral. Her livelihood was making men happy and none of them would be attending. They had, after all, wives and girlfriends that they loved - Annabel's passing was of no consequence to them. Victoria Fankin, in her capacity as the wealthiest person in town, attended every funeral. Therefore, it was no surprise to see her there with her dear friend, Janie Dawson, who was never far from the formidable woman's side.

They stood by the coffin side by side looking at the woman who held on longer than they had ever expected. Whispering softly, Janie said, "Annabel Blowhart is gone...we are now done."

Victoria reached over, took Janie's hand, and squeezed it gently. "It is finished. Now it is time to move on together with our lives ."

The two women walked out of the Silas Griever's viewing room hand in hand into the sunlight of the day.

"What a glorious day," Victoria said happily. "Shall we go home now?"

"Yes, but only on one condition."

"And, what would that be?" Victoria asked with a twinkle in her eye.

"We never bake cookies again."

Victoria's head lifted to the sky as she let out an uproariously happy laugh. How she loved the woman next to her.

Post Script

Several months later, the town's folks and the miners alike were clamoring for the two women's cookies. Although Victoria and Janie repeatedly said they were no longer baking almond cookies, they were hounded night and day. Finally, they gave into the whining of the town's folks and set up a tea room and bakery next to the mercantile. After the grand opening, the shop flourished soon becoming known state-wide for its fabulous almond cookies. In next to no time they were taking mail orders and sending their cookies around the world. Janie felt they needed to branch out so they added a line of lacy silk underwear that were fashioned after ones they had seen in a French catalogue. Almost overnight, shops featuring the naughty creations were opened in every brothel for miles around. The store's name, Victoria's Secret Cookies, dropped the word cookies from its name and flourished as the store where one could feel the softness of silk against their skin and eat cookies too.

The End

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