

Vicki Silver

Vicki and C.J. yelled as they saw where they were headed, straight for an intersection. Unless they stopped soon they would plow into another car. The two looked at each other frantically as Vicki spun the steering wheel to the right, hoping they would spin out and stop in time.

The Stolen Gem

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VICKI SILVER

M Y S T E R I E S

THE STOLEN GEM



A L I S S A W O O D

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Vicki Silver

Dedicated to:

My parents, for their support and determination to get my books published.

My Grandparents, for their love and belief in me.

City Gate Church in Fort Worth, TX, for helping with my spiritual growth.

My wonderful boyfriend, Chris, for his support in saying that I'll write 'The Great American Novel' someday.

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And to all of the English teachers I've ever had. Because of you, I discovered a new source of creativity in myself.

And, most importantly, to my Lord Jesus Christ for his saving grace.

Chapter 1

*"Show me the way
Show me the direction to the light
Show me the right way to go
And make things all right
Lead me to the truth of what I've become
And what I can be in you"*

As Vicki listened to her favorite radio station, she sang along. She moved around her room, dusting off old softball trophies and putting objects back in their proper places. Her parents agreed to give Vicki an allowance of twenty dollars a week if she could keep her room clean. It seemed to be the only way to motivate her. After all, she did need the money for gas.

She took a moment to glance around, scanning her eyes past ribbons from track meets, and various movie posters. One poster in particular featured the character of Victor Blades in his newest action movie, *Impossible*, which Vicki had yet to see. It was one of the

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few PG-13 films recently released that Vicki's parents planned to see as a family – when they had time.

Vicki made a mental note to empty her over-flowing trashcan and eventually vacuum the floor. She figured that she could be done in an hour, if she didn't get distracted.

It was ten o'clock in the morning when the music was interrupted by a familiar chime. At the sound of the doorbell, Vicki Silver immediately stopped singing. "Now what?" the seventeen-year-old said aloud. She had been trying to relax all morning but every time she began to enjoy herself, and it was difficult to enjoy cleaning, something else just had to happen.

Vicki stretched quickly and changed clothes. She threw on a pair of jeans and a red T-shirt that was thrown over her desk chair. The computer blinked at her as she accidentally touched the mouse.

She stood up to her full height of five foot eight and adjusted her long brown hair into a messy ponytail. Before she raced down the stairs, Vicki grabbed the bag of trash, figuring that as long as she was headed downstairs, she could at least throw it away. The doorbell rang continuously.

"I'm coming, wait just a minute," Vicki called out just as she reached the door. Upon pulling it open, she discovered her best friend C.J. Summers, who was frantically trying to wake up the entire household.

She met C.J. in the third grade when Vicki moved to Maine from Tennessee. They

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became friends when they discovered their mutual love for, of all things, mystery books. That commonality had fueled their passion for solving crimes.

C.J.'s dark brown hair was a mess from running, which was interesting considering she lived just two houses down. Vicki quickly noted that her best friend was still in her nightclothes, which consisted of a pair of gray sweatpants and a light pink top. Vicki instantly wondered what had brought her normally sensible-minded friend out of her home in this condition.

C.J.'s dark brown eyes sparkled with excitement as she practically ran inside.

"What's going on?" Vicki asked, "What's happened?"

In her exhilaration, C.J.'s Spanish accent sounded thicker than usual. "You know how we've always wanted to be detectives?" C.J. asked. "Well, I just found our first real case!"

Ever since she was little, Vicki had always wanted to be a detective. Her mom and dad were lawyers but she had wanted the job with the action. The thought of solving a real crime had always thrilled her, and here was her chance.

"Well, what's it about?" Vicki asked, her blue eyes sparkling with excitement.

C.J. laughed at her friend's enthusiasm. She shared Vicki's excitement, they had dreamed of starting their own agency after high school.

"There was a robbery at the Heritage Museum, and someone stole the famous Storning Diamond," C.J. exclaimed.

Everyone knew about the Storning Diamond. It had put the Heritage Museum on the map, so to speak. It was supposedly the largest diamond ever unearthed in North America. It was said to weigh a full eight carats.

C.J. continued, "And, since summer vacation has just started, we've got lots of time to investigate."

Vicki joined in the excitement, "This is wonderful! Our first case and at the start of summer vacation."

C.J. had an idea, "We could get jobs at the museum as tour guides. We know the place well enough. That way we can check out the crime scene and everybody who works there without them knowing!"

"Let's get over there right now and talk to the curator!" Vicki said. The excited teen ran upstairs to change clothes, this time into something appropriate for the museum.

Once ready, C.J. and Vicki both ran down the stairs to get into Vicki's car. But, before they got through the door, Vicki was halted by the one voice she didn't want to hear.

"What are you doing?" her sister Becky asked, half in curiosity and half mockingly.

Becky was two years older than Vicki at nineteen and loved to tease Vicki about wanting to become a detective. With her blond hair and green eyes, Becky looked just like her

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mom and was easily one of the prettiest girls in town. But, that didn't make up for her sour disposition.

Becky did have friends, but not many. And the ones she had, she didn't treat very well. More than likely, it was from growing up with lawyers for a mom and dad. The way their parents ruled the household was to turn everything into an argument, a legal argument, and 'to the victor go the spoils'.

If Becky or Vicki wanted something, they had to argue their case before their parents, and provide strong reasoning in their favor. Vicki was only surprised that they didn't have to sign contracts stating their intentions every time they left the house.

Unfortunately, Becky continued her teasing of Vicki, "You look like someone who is about to get herself into trouble, little miss detective."

Of course, Becky cared more about fashion than important news like the Museum robbery.

"We're just going to find something to do. It is summer vacation you know," Vicki answered quickly. The two girls left before Becky could say anything else, and raced to get into Vicki's red convertible.

The girls jumped in and Vicki quickly backed the car onto the street. They were just glad to get away from Becky.

Even though Becky was considered cool, she was also a bit of a showoff. She liked

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to call Vicki "her baby sister". Sometimes Vicki wished she were an only child.

"Those were some good moves to get us out of there, Vicki," C.J. offered.

"Thanks, I thought that she had us cornered," Vicki said.

They made a quick stop at C.J.'s house so she could change into something more appropriate for the interview.

Once back on the road, Vicki thought how the convertible was one of her most prized possessions. It was a European-styled sports car with a black cloth top. When Vicki had turned sixteen, she began to make a case with her parents to get the vehicle she wanted. She did her research, and found the safest vehicle with the best mileage. Of course, it also had to be sporty and cool looking.

After her parents made their judgment in the case, she received the convertible just shy of her seventeenth birthday.

With a trophy like a sports car, Vicki had to constantly remind herself it was a possession, it did not possess her. So she was careful not to boast, but to simply be grateful for her blessing, and share it with her friends and loved ones.

Even at that, everyone in town knew who owned the red convertible. With its chrome wheel covers, and candy apple red paint, it was unmistakable.

The car turned onto Main Street and then into the downtown area. After a quick

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turn onto Fourth Street, they stopped in front of the museum.

The Heritage Museum was a large, ancient-looking building, and had probably been around since the mid 1900s. The girls had been visiting the museum since they were in grade school. It was their hangout back when learning about old stuff seemed cool.

The Heritage had seen better days, and fewer guests were visiting its hallways as of late. The Storning Diamond was the biggest thing that ever happened to the museum, but it didn't seem to be enough.

Before they exited the car, Vicki saw a man drive up. He was about six-foot and had brown hair. He wore a black suit and a black tie to match. Once the man entered the building, Vicki and C.J. bolted from the car and raced up the museum steps just in time to see him enter a door labeled 'Curator, Mr. Matthews'. Once he was inside, the girls slowed their pace to a walk and knocked on the door.

"Come in," a voice said from inside. The man was putting a diamond-shaped tie tack onto his lapel as they entered. He looked up and upon seeing the two teenagers, gave them a questioning glance, "What can I do for you young ladies?"

Vicki and C.J. had seen the museum before, but they had never been in the offices. They knew very few members of the staff, and

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those they had known weren't working there anymore.

As far as a curator's office goes, Vicki supposed Mr. Matthews' office was well appointed. There was a distinct smell of apple wood tobacco. The pipes on his credenza confirmed her senses.

"Hi...Mr. Matthews is it? I'm Vicki Silver and this is my friend C.J. Summers. We are here to pick up some job applications. Are you hiring?"

He reached into a drawer in his desk, pulled out some papers, and handed them to the girls. "You can fill these out. We are in need of some tour guides. Do you girls have any experience?"

C.J. pointed to her friend, "Vicki here, and I...Hi, I'm C.J." She reached her hand out to shake Mr. Matthews'. Reluctantly Mr. Matthews extended his own, and gave her a mediocre handshake.

C.J. disregarded his rudeness, and continued, "We've been coming to this museum since we were in third grade. We probably know this place as well as anyone. You can ask our High School history teacher, Mr. Feldenhoffer."

"So, you were in Mr. Feldenhoffer's class?" said Mr. Matthews with some interest. "He and I go back a ways. If he'll vouch for you girls, that will work for me. I'll call him later. But, for now, we can hire you both on a trial basis."

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"That sounds great," Vicki chimed in. She reached out to shake Mr. Matthews' hand as well. This time he gave a more encouraging response.

Vicki had never really applied for a job before, so she was glad that C.J. was there to do the talking. Out of the two, C.J. definitely had a flair for business and persuasion. She was always thinking, which would undoubtedly prove to be useful in future cases. As soon as the girls completed their applications, Mr. Matthews gave them instructions to report at nine a.m. the next morning.

Once Vicki and C.J. left the curator's office, they let out a silent scream of excitement. The girls had played their cards right, and got the jobs. But, they didn't forget why they were there.

C.J. said, "You know, Vicki, there are lots of people working at the museum. That means there are a lot of possible suspects. And, at this point, we have to consider that any one of them could be the thief."

"And, we have jobs starting here tomorrow morning. So we can investigate anyone we believe is a prime candidate," Vicki said. "Can you believe we are about to start our first case?" she exclaimed.

As they drove back to Vicki's house, C.J. turned on the radio. For C.J., music helped her to think clearer.

The girls lived in a neighborhood that was more up-scale than most in their town of Sport, Maine. Large columns supporting

beautiful balconies for dinner parties, and of course there were impressive landscapes to be seen everywhere. Large trees lined the streets and spotted the yards, but there were few children to climb them. It was rare for families with small children to be able to afford such a neighborhood.

After about a ten-minute drive, and enough karaoke to annoy anyone, the girls were back in Vicki's driveway.

Vicki's house was a bit more modest than the others in Crest Ridge Estates. They didn't have a balcony, and while their landscaping looked nice, there wasn't a sign with a landscaping company's name posted in the front yard. It was the work of Vicki's mother.

There was a good-sized porch, which held a swinging bench. Decorative stones made a path to the front door.

Next to the house was a flower garden that was her mother's pride and joy. Gardening was her favorite hobby, since she didn't have to argue a legal case to get her garden to grow. With a little care, and God's laws of seedtime and harvest, it happened all on its own.

The newly formed detective agency went up to Vicki's room to relax and talk about the case. Vicki was just glad they didn't run into Becky again.

"Vicki," C.J. said, "I've been thinking. I don't understand something. It's confusing. I mean, why would someone steal a priceless gem like the Storning Diamond? How could they profit from it? The suspect couldn't just

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take it to a pawnshop and sell it...it would be recognized anywhere in the country. The only idea that makes sense to me, is maybe an insurance scam. The museum could stand to receive a lot of insurance money. But, that seems unlikely too. I don't think the museum owns the pieces they put on display."

"I don't know either, but let me tell you one thing," Vicki said, "We're going to solve this case, one way or another. This is our first one, and we're going to prove to everyone, including Becky, that we're smart, tough, and the best all-girl detective agency in Sport, Maine." That made them both start laughing.

Chapter 2

Mr. Matthews, or Tom as his business associates called him, had a long day ahead of him, what with all the commotion about the stolen diamond. It stood to reason that the theft of a priceless jewel of this nature could draw the attention of TV news departments from all over the state, or even the nation.

Tom wasn't sure they needed quite that much attention. But, even a little attention pointed at the old Heritage Museum could help the struggling institution. Tom had been there to witness the Heritage in its hey-day. Built in the 1960s, Tom was just a young man when it opened. And like so many students in Sport, Maine, he too came to know the halls of the Heritage as a young boy. It seemed larger than life back then.

Now, he knew every inch of the place, almost too well. During college, Tom was hired as a tour guide, but quickly moved up to antiquities care after the curator noticed how

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he respected all the pieces equally. Whether they were a collection of letters from World War II, or a Chinese water color from the Ming Dynasty, Tom treated each piece as special.

It took about fifteen years, but finally Tom had the chance to become the assistant to the curator. He was so excited to take the reins, which included improving marketing, and creating better displays and presentations, among other things. But, Tom's specialty was securing new donors. He had a knack for buttering up the older wealthier philanthropists in town, hence their names on nearly everything in the museum.

Somehow all that got lost when he was named head curator of the museum. His new duties meant a new focus. Everything became more about the bottom line, and about employees and department staff. Promoting the museum and fundraising were lost in the shuffle. And, Tom struggled to regain the focus.

But, the Storning Diamond was his greatest success. It was one of the few pieces the museum actually owned. It took a lot of donor "back scratching", and the name "Garrett J. Borbosa" on the new wing, to get enough money for such a piece. And, now it was gone.