

The Secret

By David Taylor

It was a hot and humid day. The blue sky stood out as clouds passed above buildings that seemed to touch it. The sun couldn't be seen, but Insue could feel its heat as she took a deep breath of warm air into her lungs. Letting it out, she walked across the street to an art store where an old Asian couple sat waiting for customers to buy their drawings.

Outside the store, Jack stood looking at a picture of a pair of hands holding a child in its palms. Clouds floating beneath the hands gave the drawing appearance of the child descending from the heavens inside the hands. Jack stood there thinking about the drawing, knowing who it was supposed to be, when he heard the sound of a voice, like a flute.

"I know who you are!" Insue said, craning her head back to look up at the giant of a man with an angelic African face: black eyebrows over clear intelligent brown eyes; and a short, coal-black, natural haircut. He seemed tall enough to touch the sky.

"Oh, you know who I am, but I don't know who you are, young lady," Jack said, looking down at the cute pole-thin Asian girl with long, filthy, black hair down to her waist. She looked like she hadn't eaten a good meal in all of her nine years of life. The tattered and dirty dress she wore told a story in its own. Her little oval face was smudged and made Jack want to clean it with the face towel and water he normally had with him as he ran around the world playing *The Stunning Race*. The thought made him almost forget what she said to him. However, he resisted the urge to clean it.

As he walked away from her, she followed some distance behind him, reiterating her statement. It made him feel annoyed, as if he had a pebble in his shoe while he thought about what she had said.

Stopping, he turned to her. "You're like a fox messing with a coyote, young lady. Are you going to tell me who I am or I am supposed to be, or who you think I am? But, wait. Before you expose me, can I just wash your face? I think there's something pretty under that dirt," he said, taking out the towel, pouring water over it, and roughly wiping her face. To his surprise, only a little dirt came off.

Taking the towel from his hand, she washed it herself. "That doesn't matter, old boy. But, if you buy me something to eat, I will tell you who you are afterwards," she said speaking like an adult in a child's voice. As they walked back across the street, Jack placed a hand on her narrow shoulder. He was trying to read her thoughts while they walked to a nearby restaurant. After sitting down at one of the booths, a smiling waitress came to take their order, but she quickly left with fear in her eyes.

"So, are you going to tell me who I am, young lady? But be careful what you say, for this might be your last supper," he said, seeing Jesus and his followers sitting around a table through the eyes of Judas Iscariot. Unexpectedly, the old Asian man from the art store entered the restaurant, looking right at Insue and Jack. He was concerned about her well-being, knowing she was a helpless child and believing that the tall man might harm her.

Jack placed his large hand on Insue's small unwashed hands and held them. She didn't try to remove her hands; she just smiled at him and said, "That will not work on me, nor can you read my thoughts. And I'm holding my tongue for lunch since God only knows when I may receive another free meal like the one you are going to buy for me, Jack," Insue said.