

everyone has a secret.  
is hers worst than most?

# SUSAN M. BAGANZ

DONUTS AND DETOURS



AN  
ORCHARD HILL  
CHURCH NOVEL

# Donuts & Detours

Susan M. Baganz

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### **Donuts & Detours**

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## *Dedication*

To Sue B., for sharing an office for years.  
I'm sorry about the leaves, but you had to admit they  
were pretty.



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# 1

*The expectations of life depend upon diligence;  
the mechanic that would perfect his work  
must first sharpen his tools.*

Confucius

*June 2014*

There was something comforting about the clanking of tools on metal as the men worked. Titus strode to where legs appeared from under a car. He pulled the boots and a young man's face appeared before him, smears of oil marring his features. The stubborn baseball cap remained firmly on the boy's head as always.

"B.J.?"

"Yeah?"

Brown eyes stared up at him and he frowned. "You almost done with that oil change?"

"Yeah, just tightened the last bolt." B.J. rose to his feet and placed the wrench on the table.

"Come here. I've got your next job for you." Titus waited for a second and headed for the other end of the garage.

"OK." The young man followed him. B.J. never shared anything, like why he came to help, but Titus understood the peace of working on cars. The boy carried his weight in his willingness to do whatever Titus asked as long as it was in his skill-set.

"Someone donated this vehicle. I'd like to find out how well you do running the computer codes in

assessing what we need to do to make it ready.”

The young man stood there, staring at the sedan. His head tilted. “Do you hear something?”

Music blared through the garage speakers. Titus frowned and stared at the boy. “Like what?”

“I’m not sure. Shhhh.” The boy crept closer to the vehicle, slow and intent. He got to the rear and put his ear to the metal. “Can you pop the trunk?”

Titus pulled the lever from inside the car. The lid opened, and he moved around to join the kid.

“Crap. Who would do such a thing?” B.J. reached in to pull out a black plastic bag that wiggled. He set it on the concrete floor and ripped through the plastic.

Titus gagged. The furry animal before them was covered in blood, urine and feces, and its mouth was taped shut.

Sad brown eyes searched Titus’s—and they weren’t the dog’s.

The dog whimpered.

“Will, come here. Bring your phone. We need some pictures.”

Another mechanic rushed over, snapped photos of the bag, the dog, and B.J. trying to free him.

B.J. pulled out a jackknife and slowly worked through the edge of the tape on both sides allowing the animal to open his jaws. “Do you think soap will help remove the tape?” He mused aloud but shook his head, frowning.

Titus shrugged.

B.J. picked the dog up, hauled him to the industrial size sink, turned the taps to warm water, and proceeded to bathe the animal.

Titus disposed of the plastic coffin behind the garage. He returned to watch the process as the boy

scrubbed the dog clean with dish soap.

The other men joined him.

“What will you do with him or her?”

“Him.” The young man shrugged. A tear dragged a path through the dirt on the kid’s face. “We should call the shelter. Or the police. It’s a crime to abuse an animal like this. He needs to get checked out by a vet.”

“I’ll call the police.” Titus pulled out his phone.

A towel soon swaddled the dog as B.J. sat on the floor hugging it tight.

Titus stood by the donated vehicle. It would take a lot of work to clean the smell out of that trunk. Why would someone use this shop as a dumping ground for a dog? The ugliness people were capable of astounded him.

“Ty, can you come here and hold his face still? He’ll fight me on this, but I’d rather not hurt him more while I cut this tape off. The hair is quite long and matted but if I’m careful I think I can slice it off.”

Titus knelt across from the boy who held the weak and shivering dog close.

B.J. softly crooned words of comfort while using a box cutter to slice under the tape, slowly working it off.

It took all of Ty’s will to hold the squirming dog steady as it fought the process. The police arrived as the last of the tape pulled free. Ty let the dog loose and it jumped into B.J.’s lap giving the kid licks on his face.

“Stop, you silly dog. My face is filthy.” The boy ruffled the dog’s matted hair. Obviously, the affection went both ways.

Titus grinned at the enthusiasm of the pup who still whimpered and shivered in spite of the young man who provided such tender care for it.

~\*~

Animal control arrived and took the dog away in a carrier, so it could be assessed and cared for.

B.J. fingered the card. She'd check up on the pup in a few days. If it was well enough it might be adoptable. B.J. prayed that it would. She glanced at the clock on the wall and headed over to Titus.

B.J. was really Bethany Joelle, but Ty and the rest of the men at The Garage didn't realize she was female. She dressed as a boy when she came there to work, and they accepted her as such. She'd been doing it for over a year now.

Titus, whom the men all called Ty, had only recently taken over the management of the ministry at The Garage.

She sighed. "I need to leave. I'll stop back Monday afternoon and promise to take care of that car."

"Thanks, kid. I appreciate it. I'm glad you found the dog in time," Ty said.

"Yeah, me too." B.J. walked away longing for her bath and bed.

"Hey!" Titus called after her.

"What?" She turned, fingering her key.

"Do you ever attend church?"

She shrugged. "Rarely, gotta job."

"I'm sorry. I'll pray that something will open up in your work schedule to allow you to join in worship."

B.J. frowned. "A few more Sundays off would be welcome. Thanks." She turned and headed to her scooter. She might need to work more if she were to support a dog. Could she handle it? Or would the dog be alone too much? She'd ask her landlady. Maybe between the two of them the dog would find a home

and love. Something she'd never experienced much of herself.

Once home, she let her strawberry-blond hair fall down her back. She rarely let anyone see it. As Bethany Joelle, she kept it up or in a braid at work for sanitary purposes. No one wanted to find hair in their donuts. Maybe it would be better if she cut it off. But it was one of the things she remembered of her mother—her long, red hair. If Bethany cut it off that one last tenuous link to happier days would be thrown away.

As the mechanic, B.J., she kept it hidden at the shop to avoid them realizing she was a woman. At twenty-four, petite and with a slim build, she wore boy's jeans when she worked at the shop.

She showered, made a quick sandwich, and climbed into her bed. Alone. Just like every other night. And that's the way it would be until God took her home. Life was safer that way. If she kept busy enough she didn't think about how lonely she really was.

~\*~

With the long days of summer, getting up at 2:15 AM for her three o'clock shift was hard. Even getting to bed early was a trial since it was so light out when Bethany had to sleep. Room darkening shades kept out the breeze. With the summer warmth and no air conditioning, she needed all the airflow she could get. It was bad enough that it was hot at the bakery despite the air conditioning. There wasn't any AC at the garage either.

Bethany's car didn't have air, only hot black and blue vinyl seats that stuck and burned if she wore shorts, which of course, she didn't.

She strode into the grocery store and stopped at the staff lounge. She dropped her bag in her locker, grabbed her white coat, and slipped on her white bakery cap. She glanced in the mirror. Attractiveness was a liability.

“Good morning, Bethany Joelle,” her cheerful boss, Jack, sang to her. He was older and looked a little like a cartoonish chef with his orange mustache and his hair, which stuck out from under his hat. “Ready to whip up some donuts for the church crowd?”

Bethany nodded. “Sure.” She prepared batter for the cake donuts while letting the dough rise for the glazed ones. She was soon in her zone, cutting out donuts and making the donut holes, baking and frying them as needed and topping or filling them.

Jack was busy with special order cakes due to be picked up that day along with others that might be needed.

Once the bakery opened at six, there were fresh donuts on the self-serve shelves.

Bethany moved on to the bread and buns. When she was done, she’d help with frosting and decorating cakes.

There was only as much conversation needed to get the tasks done. She liked it that way. Jack was an easy man to work with. A husband with several grown children he had to be the kindest man she knew. Well, except for Titus Rickmeyer. But the mechanic thought she was a boy. There’d be no hope for her to do the hobby she loved if he ever realized she was a woman. She feared that if the men at The Garage knew, they wouldn’t let her serve there.

It wasn’t that the church had anything against women fixing cars. They’d never stated that. But she’d

worked in garages in the past and found being the only woman caused a lot of unwanted attention. There was no stated rule within the church ministry prohibiting women, but she didn't want to put men in a situation where there would be temptation, or cause trouble.

Plus, men usually didn't take a woman mechanic seriously and she hated to be talked down to. It was good Bethany rarely attended church. The chance of her discovery was low. Without her baseball cap on, and with her hair down, and no oil smeared on her face—she appeared different.

At least she wasn't beautiful. That would be totally wasted on her.

Thankfully, there hadn't been an interview to volunteer at The Garage. Just a quick meeting and a quick telling of her belief in God. The former guy who ran it was more interested in her ability to fix a car and her availability than who she was as a person. She'd avoided most of the men in her time serving there and they'd respected her need to be alone. She hoped that continued.

"Try to relax today, Bethany Joelle," Jack called to her as she started to unbutton her work smock to leave a little after lunch.

"Thanks, Jack. You, too. See you bright and early tomorrow morning." Bethany stepped out of the bakery with a final wave at Jack and undid her hair tie allowing the red locks to flow down her back. She liked it that Jack usually called her by her full first name. Most people shortened it, which was fine, but still... She remembered her mother whispering 'Bethany Joelle' as she patted Bethany's back and held her close. Bethany blinked back the tears the memory evoked. Nothing would bring her mother back and

there was no need going there. She had a good boss. That was all. And she was grateful.

After collecting her bag, Bethany skipped down the stairs and headed for the exit and collided with something solid. "Oh! Excuse me. I was in a hurry and not watching where I was going." Bethany gasped as she stepped back. Of all the people...

Titus smiled at her. "Well, if I need to be run into, nothing like a beautiful woman to practically knock me off my feet."

Her face warmed and she was certain it flamed red. She gulped and moved past him, hurrying out the door. With her hair down and not wearing her trademark baseball cap, he hopefully had no idea she was B.J. from The Garage. *Whew. Close call.*

~\*~

Titus watched her go, amused at her blush and intrigued by her reticence to engage in a flirtation. Cute woman. Petite. He went towards the bakery. His young mechanic, B.J., according to records at the shop, worked here but Ty didn't find him. He grabbed some donuts to take home to his roommates and picked up the other items they needed.

He exited to the parking lot and headed for his car. In a row at the back of the lot, he spied the spunky girl with the hood up on her car and hair now braided down her back. He dropped his groceries into the back of his pickup and strode over to her. "Trouble?" he asked.

"Idiot me. I forgot to turn my lights off when I got to work this morning."

"Dead battery?"

She nodded.

"I'll bring my truck over and give you a jump."

"Great, thanks." She glanced up at him with a small smile and thrust her hand out. "Bethany Joelle."

Ty shook it and noticed the rough callouses on her hands. In spite of that, a jolt traveled up his arms. "Titus. Titus Rickmeyer. You can call me Ty. Have we met before?"

"Other than running into you a few minutes ago?"

He chuckled. "I'll be right back." He pulled his truck over to the little hatchback, popped the hood, pulled out cables, and hooked them up.

The young woman watched.

"You can try to start your car now."

Bethany turned the key.

Nothing.

Titus held up a hand for her to stop. "Let's wait a minute." He checked all the connectors to make sure they were tight. "OK, try again."

Nothing.

Her head fell against the steering wheel in defeat.

Ty frowned. "It's beyond redemption. I'm sorry." He pulled off the cables, wound them up, and shut both hoods. He walked around where she sat in the front seat. "I can give you a ride to the store to get another battery. I mean, I realize we just met and if you want to call my pastor for a reference, I would understand."

She held up a hand. "No. I know who you are, and your reputation. I would appreciate a lift, but if you need to get your groceries home first, I totally understand. I can wait here for you."

"Nonsense. I can drop them off on the way." He put his hands on his hips and waited for her.

She released a long sigh and grabbed her bag and keys before exiting the car.

Titus beat her to the passenger side door, opened it, and offered her a hand.

She ignored his help and pulled herself up into the bench seat.

Ty closed the door and ran around to his side of the car. He started it up and noted the sweet scent of vanilla and sugar that filled the cab.

"You work at the store?"

"Yeah."

"And start really early?"

"Uh, huh."

"What department?"

"Bakery."

"No wonder you smell so sweet."

No comment was forthcoming from the woman next to him. She fidgeted with her car keys as he drove down the road in silence for a few blocks.

"I have a friend who works in the bakery. Do you know B.J.?"

"Yeah, I do." She continued to stare out the window.

Titus was frustrated at his failed conversational gambits. "Do you ever get to go to church?"

"Sometimes. When I do I attend Orchard Hill."

"Hey, that's where I go."

"I'm aware. That's one of the reasons I knew you were safe."

"Not all men are safe because they attend church."

"True, but it was only one of the reasons. I've heard of your reputation."

"Really? I have a 'reputation' people talk about?"

"I don't listen to gossip and I don't spread it."

You're one of the good guys."

"I won't debate the issue." Titus grinned. This young lady knew him in a favorable light. That pleased him. He drove to his apartment building. "I'll be right back."

"OK."

He put the stuff in the fridge that needed to keep cool. The rest he left to unpack later. Or maybe his roommates would do it. He jogged back out to the car.

"OK, on to the store." The drive was quiet. He rushed around to get her door before she exited but failed. "You do realize that some men want to be gallant, right?"

She ducked her head. "Sorry. I've had too many instances where I've sat waiting, left behind because many men don't get the door."

"Lamentable, but with me, you don't need to worry. I won't forget you."

Her cheeks turned pink. Her hair fell out of its loose braid to form a curtain to obscure her features. Intriguing.

He recommended a battery and she agreed. They reached the check-out and she pulled out her wallet to pay. Titus hefted the unit to haul to the truck and assisted her back in. Once again, she refused his hand to help her up. He grinned. She might be small but she wasn't helpless.

Once back at the dead vehicle, she popped the hood and grabbed some tools out of the trunk. She managed to get the battery out without his assistance. Her short nails had dirt under them.

He motioned to her hands as he sat the new battery in place, secured it, and hooked it up. "How does a baker get dirty fingernails and calloused

hands?"

She glanced at her hands. "I do more in life than bake, and when I work in the kitchen I wear gloves so stained fingers aren't an issue."

"Huh."

She went to the car and started the engine, which purred to life. "It works." She came around as he lowered the hood. "Thank you, Titus. It's not often I've experienced a white knight coming to my rescue."

He chuckled and offered his hand.

She shook and released his hand as if burned.

"I'm glad I was able to help. I hope I run into you again soon, Bethany Joelle."

She raised an eyebrow, got in her car, and with a little wave drove away.

Ty frowned. The sprite was cute but there was something familiar about her. She knew who he was. He had a nagging suspicion he'd met her before but he was sure he would have remembered. He'd figure it out. He wanted to meet her again, and get to know her better.

It was the first time in a long time that he'd been struck with such interest. The sizzle of her touches and her lack of flirting made the puzzle of Bethany Joelle one he wanted to solve.

## 2

*Hope is the poor man's bread.*

Anonymous

Bethany called the shelter first thing Monday morning to check on the dog. It was still alive and under the care of a good vet. She'd be able to visit soon. Returning from her break, she struggled to focus.

Jack called her over. "Bethany Joelle, you've already been here long enough, but could you stay for another hour? Pat had trouble with her babysitter and will get here as soon as she can."

"But that's customer service work. I'm no good at that. Give me dough and I'm happy, but people? Not so much." Bethany's breath shuttered.

"I understand. I'd stay but I need to accompany my wife to a doctor appointment. Please? Double time or you can take it off later in the week."

She sighed. "Fine." She prayed that somehow the next hour would pass without her having to actually deal with the public.

~\*~

Titus spotted B.J. walk in later than normal and head straight for the donated vehicle. "Hey, B.J.," he called out.

The young boy stopped and turned. "Yeah?"

"Would you mind trying to get the trunk clean