
SHELBY'S SECRETS

A Strong Man's Hand Book Two

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This book contains fantasy themes appropriate for mature readers only.
Nothing in this book should be interpreted as Blushing Books' or the author's
advocating any non-consensual sexual activity.

Chapter 1

Children chattered as they made their way to their seats. Shelby Beauchamp turned away from the blackboard and smiled at the noisy group, waiting patiently until the bell rang for class to begin.

"Good morning, kids."

"Good morning, Miss Shelby," came the answering chorus.

"Did you all have a good weekend?"

There was a chatter of answers from the first graders.

Shelby said, "The first thing we're going to do this morning is our spelling words, so take out a piece of paper and we'll start."

The day flew by and when school was out, Shelby packed up her things and started out of the building, calling goodbyes as she went. She was tall and beautiful, with shining dark hair, deep blue eyes, and a brilliant smile that betrayed how much she loved what she did for a living. She had a few errands to run on her way home, stopping first at the pharmacy for shampoo, then the small grocery store in town, finally stopping at her sister-in-law's bakery, The Artful Oven. She knew Maggie was working late, preparing for a lunchtime catering the next day. The little bell

jingled as she went through the door, and she called a hello to Maggie.

Maggie was bustling around the kitchen as usual, putting slits in the top crusts of a couple of peach pies she was about to slip into the oven while a big pot of soup simmered on the stove and cookies cooled on a rack. She peeked in at the bread baking in the second oven before turning to give Shelby a hug.

"Hi, Shelby, how was school?"

"It was a good day, even for a Monday," Shelby said with a smile. "The kids were good, even Jacob."

"Is he still giving you trouble?"

"A little. I think things are just not too happy at home. That's hard on kids."

Maggie said, "I don't know his parents. I hope things get better for them."

Shelby replied, "They keep pretty much to themselves; they don't come into Boone much."

"Are you and Sam still on for Saturday night?"

"Yes, we're looking forward to it, burgers and beer, a little pool, and music."

"Good," Maggie said with satisfaction. "We need a night out."

Maggie's dog, Beck, wandered over and nudged Shelby's hand with his nose, asking for his ears to be scratched. She was happy to oblige and absently stroked him while she chatted with Maggie.

"Do you have any of today's soup left, Maggie?"

Maggie said, "I have one quart; I just put it in a container. It's beef barley with mushrooms. Would you like some?"

"Yes, a quart would be perfect. I have a salad at home, and that'll make a great Monday night supper for Gran and me."

"Sure, and I have half a loaf of sourdough to go with it," Maggie said as she got the soup out of the refrigerator. "How about a dessert?"

"No, we'll pass on that. We both indulge in your treats a little more than we should," Shelby said with a laugh.

"Well, it sure doesn't show. You both look great!"

"It's that time in the gym that saves me," Shelby said. "With Gran, I think it's just good genes and great metabolism."

Maggie sighed. "We should all be so lucky."

"Well, I'll get out of your hair so you can get finished." With a final pat for Beck, Shelby left the bakery.

Shelby Beauchamp had been raised in the city but had spent lots of time with her grandmother in the quaint little town of Boone, Indiana. The town bordered a state park that offered campgrounds and trails for horseback riding and was full of artsy-craftsy shops. It resembled an old west town, with wooden storefronts and sidewalks, and hitching posts along the main street for the trail riders.

After college, Shelby began her career as a first grade teacher and seemed to be thriving in the city. She met a man and they began a relationship that gradually became serious. There even was some talk of marriage until the relationship suddenly ended. Shelby refused to talk about it, and her family only knew that the romance had ended. A few months later, Shelby returned to Boone and took a job at the Boone Community School. She told her grandmother and brother, Carter, that she had grown tired of the city, with its traffic and chaos.

GG was delighted to have her granddaughter back in town, and Shelby quickly became fast friends with Maggie. She loved her new job at the school and soon realized how much she had always loved the little town of Boone. She even began dating Sam Davis, Carter's business partner, although she was careful to keep their relationship on the casual side.

"Hi, Gran," Shelby called as she went in the front door of her grandmother's house.

"Hi, Shelby. I'm in the kitchen."

Shelby gave her grandmother a hug and kiss as she walked into the kitchen.

"I brought soup and bread from Maggie's to go with our salad for dinner."

GG smiled. "That sounds great, especially for a Monday evening. How was your day?"

"Really good, how about you?"

"It was a little slow in the shop, but that's not unusual on Monday. I got started on some paperwork I'd been putting off, and I just brought it home and finished it. So I'm feeling productive and ready for a glass of wine."

Shelby laughed and said, "That sounds good to me, too."

Shelby opened a bottle of wine and the two sipped while they chatted.

GG said, "I got an email from Savannah today. She's going to France for a couple of weeks."

"Really! She sure loves her traveling, doesn't she?"

Savannah was Shelby's identical twin sister. She had married young, divorced not long after, and had gotten an enormous settlement in the divorce. She did what she wanted, when she wanted, and had always considered Boone to be beneath her.

"She's restless. She's looking for something and never seems to find it."

Shelby said, "I haven't heard from her in quite a while. The last time I texted her, she didn't answer. I wish she'd come and visit for a while."

GG replied, "So do I. If she'd just let her guard down and give Boone a chance, I think she'd find out that she has a place here, too."

Shelby answered with a sigh, "Well, she'll have to do it on her own if she ever does. Nobody can influence Savannah to do anything."

"True enough. By the way, I'm going out with some old friends on Saturday night."

"Perfect," Shelby said. "Sam and I are going to Outriggers with Carter and Maggie."

"Well, good. We'll both sleep in on Sunday."

The week slipped by, and Sam picked Shelby up on Saturday for their burger date.

"Hi, gorgeous," Sam greeted Shelby as she opened the door.

Shelby laughed at him and said, "Hi, Sam, you're good for a girl's ego."

He kissed her on the cheek and shook his head. "Just telling the truth."

"Come on in; I just need to grab my bag and jacket."

Sam followed her into GG's house. With an admiring whistle, he said, "Somebody sure did some good work renovating this place."

With a laugh, Shelby replied, "They sure did. I'd recommend them highly."

Sam and Carter had renovated most of GG's big, old house. Sam helped Shelby shrug into her jacket and they went out the door, chatting easily.

Maggie and Carter had already gotten a table at Outriggers and waved them over as they walked through the door. The bar had picked up a loyal clientele since new owners had taken over the year before. Friday and Saturday nights, especially, were busy times for the place, known for its friendly atmosphere and excellent bar food. There were a couple of pool tables and games and multiple TVs for sports events, and the crowd was generally well behaved.

The four ordered beer and waited a little while to order food, munching on a basket of popcorn in the meantime. Sam and Carter talked about their latest job for Elizabeth Chandler, who despised men but trusted no one else to work around her house. Maggie and Shelby laughed helplessly at their exaggerations about Mrs. Chandler and her beloved little dog.

"I'm not kidding," Sam said. "There was Carter with that dog

hanging off his leg by the teeth and Miz Chandler yelling at him and telling him to put her dog down."

"Yeah," Carter said with a scowl. "And Sam was doubled over laughing, and I swear that dog was grinning at me!"

Maggie patted him comfortingly on the arm. "It's okay, honey. Sam wouldn't let the mean old dog really hurt you."

Carter looked insulted. "Little you know. The little bastard drew blood."

Sam was laughing harder. "Yep, almost a whole drop."

Carter said, "I'm telling you, I'm not going back there unless she puts the dog up where it can't get near us."

Shelby asked, "Did you tell Miz Chandler that?"

Carter was disgusted. "No, she was too busy fussing over the mutt and asking it if her poor baby was hurt."

Shelby said seriously, "Maybe you and Miz Chandler should bring in a dog whisperer."

Sam and Maggie burst out laughing at the look on Carter's face.

Kelli, one of the bar owners, came over to talk to them for a couple of minutes, and soon after, they ordered their food. They had a good night, eating, drinking, playing a little pool and darts, and enjoying their evening out. They had switched to Cokes soon after dinner and left shortly before midnight, calling their final goodbyes in the parking lot.

Sam walked Shelby to the front door, his hand linked with hers. At the door, she turned and asked him if he wanted to come in. Sam placed his hand on the door above her head and leaned over her, looking at her quizzically. When he stroked her cheek with a finger, she turned her head away a little.

"Shelby," he drawled. "When are you going to let me get inside that head of yours? You only let me get so close, then you back away. Don't you like me?"

Shelby shifted uncomfortably. "Of course, I like you. I wouldn't go out with you if I didn't."

"But you still just don't let me in. What's up with that?"

"Sam...you know I told you I wasn't up for a serious relationship from the start."

"Yeah, but I'm really not convinced that you wouldn't like to. And don't you think it's fair to tell me why?"

Shelby lifted her chin. "Yes, it probably is, but I'm just not ready to go there. I understand if you don't want to see me on that basis, but I just don't have any more to offer right now."

Sam sighed and said, "Well, I'm not giving up that easily. I have a lot of patience when I'm after something I really want, so you're not getting rid of me just yet."

"I'm sorry, Sam. I know it's not fair. I don't want to hurt you."

"Oh, now, it doesn't hurt that bad. We just had a good time, didn't we?"

She nodded miserably.

"Well, then, I'm good with that. Don't you worry about me. I'm not some kind of masochist. I'm having a fine time chasing you, and I just might catch you yet."

Shelby laughed a little. "I can almost picture you doing it."

"See? One day you'll look back and wonder what the hell you were holding out for."

He gave her a light kiss and said, "See you soon."

Shelby slipped inside and watched him walk to his truck. He whistled and gave a little wave back at her. She closed the door as he backed out and shook her head in frustration.

"Sometimes I don't know what's wrong with you, Shelby," she muttered out loud.

GG was already in bed, so she locked up and turned out the lights on her way to her room. She plugged her cell phone in and went to wash her face and brush her teeth. When she returned after changing into her pajamas, she saw her phone blinking. She thought it must be Sam or Maggie, so she opened the text message. As she read, the color drained from her face. With a stab of her finger, she deleted the message.

"Bastard," she muttered as she got into bed. When her phone flashed again, she ignored it. After a good twenty minutes of tossing and turning, she gave in and read the message.

Hi, Shelby. Since you deleted my first message, here it is again. See how well I know you? It took a little work, but I did track down where you disappeared to. Boone, Indiana, huh? Sounds like a real hot town. I figure you've had time to cool down by now, so I'm going to look you up. No reason we can't start fresh, right? I'll be seeing you soon. Griff

Shelby threw a pillow across the room, nearly shaking with outrage. "That bastard thinks he can just walk in and start all over again? He actually thinks I'd fall for him again? It'll be a cold day in hell before I ever speak to him again! Unbelievable!"

She didn't realize her voice had risen until GG tapped at her door.

"Shelby? Are you all right?"

"Yes. Yes, Gran, I'm fine." Shelby walked over and opened her door, tossing her hair back. "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to wake you."

"I was just reading a little bit; I didn't get to bed long ago, myself. What's wrong?"

"Nothing." At the look on GG's face, she amended, "Well, nothing important. I just got an arrogant, self-centered text from someone I thought I'd put behind me for good."

Her voice had risen again, and GG cocked her head and said, "Maybe we should have a cup of tea and a talk. Come on; come with me."

GG snagged her hand and gave her no choice but to follow. She started to fill the teakettle, but Shelby said, "I think I'd rather have a drink."

"All right," GG answered and got out the whiskey and two glasses. After pouring generous amounts for them both, she led Shelby to the library, where they sank into the couch in front of the fireplace.

"Now, what's got you all fired up? Was it the man you were involved with in the city?"

Shelby took a sip and gave a big sigh. "Yes, and I really don't have any desire to talk about him."

"Okay," GG said comfortably, sipping from her own glass.

Shelby tapped her fingers on the arm of the couch then burst out, "He's just such an arrogant asshole! I don't know who he thinks he is!"

"You mean the man you don't want to talk about?"

Shelby nodded mutinously.

"Maybe it would help if you told me his name. Or we can stick with the man from the city."

"Griff," Shelby spit the name out. "His name is Griff Tanner."

"Griff," GG said as if tasting the name. "Yes, definitely sounds like an arrogant asshole."

She surprised Shelby into a laugh. "Oh, Gran, you're the best!"

"Well, he doesn't have enough sense or taste to appreciate you, apparently, so I'm afraid it would be all too easy to believe he's an arrogant asshole."

Shelby leaned over to give her gran a hug. "He really is."

"I believe you, love. Don't you think it might do you good to tell the whole story of what happened with him? Don't you think it's a little odd that you just now told me his name? Weren't you contemplating marrying him?"

Shelby heaved a huge sigh. "Honestly, I guess it probably would. But I just don't think I can, at least not yet. It's such a sore spot; I just want to get him out of my mind and keep him out."

"Okay, then the subject is closed. Oh, except, what on earth did he tell you that set you off like this?"

"He said it took some effort, but he tracked down to where I "disappeared" to, and he figures I've cooled down by now and we can start fresh. So he's coming to see me."

"Really. Then, I have to agree with you, he is an arrogant asshole. I'm afraid he won't find much of a welcome here."

Shelby said glumly, "He won't care. He has no regard for other people's feelings, and he doesn't care a bit what people think of him. I used to think it was confidence, but he honestly doesn't care about anyone else's opinion."

GG blinked and said, "He sounds enormously unpleasant."

"He hides it very well. He can be charming and engaging, but there's not a bit of sincerity in him. He's all about himself and what he wants. It was a true shock for me to finally see him as he really was."

"When is he planning to make this visit?"

"I don't know. He just said he'd be seeing me soon."

"Well," GG said thoughtfully, "I'd say that gives us a chance to prepare a real welcome for him."

"Oh, Gran, I don't want you to get involved in my mess. I'm probably overreacting. It was just a shock to get a message from him. I thought I had put him behind me for good. I think I just need to tell him that I don't want anything to do with him, I'm not interested in anything he has to say, and I want him to go away and stay away. Forever."

"That sounds plain enough. Do you think it'll work?"

"If it doesn't, I'll repeat it. He won't get any reward for his efforts, so surely, he'll get tired of it."

GG patted her hand and said, "You know, your friends and family are with you, and if you need our help, we'll never hesitate to give it. We won't let Griff Tanner disrupt your life, I promise."

Shelby gave her another hug and said, "Thanks, Gran, I love you to the moon."

"I love you, too, baby. What do you say we get some sleep now?"

Shelby finished her whiskey and stifled a yawn. "Sounds good to me. I'll see you in the morning."