

Mary's Secrets

Mary was walking home from school as slowly as she could. Most of the time, she rushed to her after-school job helping Mrs. Deno, her neighbor. But today, Mrs. Deno was out of town visiting a friend, so Mary had decided to take the long route home. Walking helped her to think, and she needed time to come up with a plan. She had a note from school in her hand and a new cell phone in her pocket. She had not told her dad about the cell phone, and she did not know how to approach him about the note from school.

Mrs. Deno, the seventy-five-year old widow who lived five houses down from her, had given her the cell phone. Mrs. Deno called Mary her personal assistant because Mary had been helping her at her house every day after school since last May. Most of the time her jobs were simple errands, but she also helped plan Mrs. Deno's meals, go grocery shopping, and prepare meals. Thursdays were baking days. Mrs. Deno and Mary could bake up a storm. With her extensive collection of cookbooks, it was not surprising that Mrs. Deno was the reigning champion in the senior center monthly bake-off. When Mrs. Deno won the baking contest the second time, she invited Mary to the senior center the next day and told everyone that Mary was her secret weapon for winning the contest.

Mary's favorite job at Mrs. Deno's was to record books on tape for her. Last month, she had recorded some poems she had written for a contest at school and had given them to Mrs. Deno for her birthday. Mrs. Deno said Mary had a professional and yet refreshing voice and told her that her poems exhibited great potential and talent. Mrs. Deno's encouragement started Mary thinking about becoming a journalist and professional writer. Mary wished she could have a grandmother like Mrs. Deno. However, she knew Dad saw Mrs. Deno as merely an acquaintance, a neighbor. Dad felt uneasy with Mrs. Deno's compliments of Mary. She knew her father wouldn't be pleased if he knew how much time she really spent with her elderly friend.

Two weeks ago, Mrs. Deno had given Mary a cell phone and told her that she had added her to her family phone plan. "I can't accept this phone!" Mary had exclaimed, with memories of her father's speech about not accepting handouts from others echoing in her mind.

"Of course you can. You are my emergency contact in case something happens," Mrs. Deno said jokingly. Although Mary knew Mrs. Deno was generally in good health, she did not like her joking about being sick. She remembered her own grandmother had died of a sudden heart attack when she was about Mrs. Deno's age. Mary frowned and left the cell phone on the table. Somehow, she seemed to feel that carrying the phone implied she

thought Mrs. Deno might need her help for an emergency, and she wasn't ready to think about that happening.

Mrs. Deno nodded her head with understanding and said, "I'm sorry, dear. I know you care about me, and I appreciate that. I am very responsible about taking care of my health, Scout's honor." She picked up the phone and put it in Mary's palm. "I want you to have this. I really do."

Mary picked up the cell phone and examined the slick design in awe. She had always wanted a cell phone, but she knew her father thought they were an unnecessary expense, one they couldn't afford. She considered her options. If she accepted the phone, she was risking her father's anger. If she refused it, she might hurt Mrs. Deno's feelings. She was torn. Still, she loved the way the phone felt in her hand. She felt so grown up!

Mrs. Deno saw that Mary's resolve was wavering. She seemed to be smiling to herself as she said, "Actually, I was hoping you could help me figure out how to use all the features on the phone. I thought that if you had your own phone you could learn and then come show me how to use it."

Mary thought for a few more seconds and then decided that Mrs. Deno deserved her help. She slipped the phone Mrs. Deno had given her onto the counter and looked up at her friend. "I guess I should investigate the options for you," she said. "May I borrow your computer for a little while?"

Mrs. Deno walked over to the computer with her and then left Mary to her investigation. First, Mary focused on downloading the owner's manual from the internet. Using that information, she typed a simplified version of a how-to manual for her friend and saved it to the computer. She also printed the instructions in large font so Mrs. Deno could see them easily. As she was typing, Mary hummed a little song to herself.

When she was finished, she wandered to the kitchen where Mrs. Deno was waiting for her. "This model is very user friendly," said Mary. "If you hand me your phone, I'll help you program it."

"Thank you. Don't forget this number here," said Mrs. Deno, her face glowing a faint pink.

"Whose number is that?" asked Mary.

Mrs. Deno blushed again and said, "Just a new friend I met in the botanical garden tour yesterday. We both like chamber music, paintings, and mystery novels." Mrs. Deno watched attentively as Mary's nimble fingers danced on the keypad of the cell phone.

She noticed that Mary hadn't programmed in the number to her own cell phone and looked at her seriously. "Mary," she said, "It really would make me feel better if you would accept the cell phone and program your number for me." She paused and then her face lit

up. "Besides, you can call anyone, maybe even Jose. I am sure you two have a lot to say." Mary blushed. Besides her best friend Jessica, Mrs. Deno was the only one who knew how she felt about Jose.

She wouldn't dream of telling her father about him. He was too busy to hear about those things. He seemed to be working all the time in his job as a nurse at the hospital. He was very matter-of-fact. Being the youngest one in the family, Mary watched her older siblings being questioned by her dad. She had learned early on the importance of obeying his rules, and when her dad had told them they would not be able to participate in any extracurricular activities this semester, Mary did not argue or ask why.

Mary noticed the fatigue in her dad's eyes all the time. She knew that being a single parent was no easy task. She had thought with her oldest sister Rachael and her older brother Drew in college her dad might finally be able to relax this year. However, it seemed that he was busier than ever. Mary did not want to add herself to her dad's list of burdens. Instead, she tried to keep everything all to herself.

Mary sighed deeply when she saw the white fence that circled her yard. She still hadn't come up with a plan, and she also hadn't taken time to rehearse the speech she would need to give in a few days. How could she tell her dad that she needed to attend the awards ceremony downtown when he did not even know she had entered the contest? It was scheduled for Saturday, which meant she didn't have much time. She saw her dad's car in the driveway and stopped in her tracks. She wasn't ready to confront him yet, so she decided to try to sneak upstairs before her father noticed her.

Her heart sank when she walked in the house. The first thing she saw was her father sitting at the base of the stairs, reading the newspaper. Mary tried to avoid eye-contact, but her dad lowered the paper and said, "Mary Jane."

Mary's heart sank further. It was usually not a good sign when Dad used her middle name. Her father pointed to the chair next to him. "Sit down. I need to talk to you." He took a deep breath, moved the newspaper over to the left a little to cover what looked like a small red book on his lap, and asked, "So how was school today?"

"Fine," Mary said.

"Is there something you want to tell me?"

"About what?"

"You tell me. I would rather hear it from you than from someone else."

Mary looked at her father's face, and tried to find a clue about what he was referring to. Finally, she lowered her eyes and focused on the floral pattern of the tablecloth. "I don't know," she said, playing with the ring on her finger.

She could feel the heat of her dad's attention. "Aunt Suzie called," he began.

Mary interrupted him, "Aunt Suzie? Aunt Suzie is just gossiping."

Suddenly, her father grinned. "Gossiping, is she? I'm just glad somebody around here took the time to fill me in on something this exciting. I asked your aunt to buy you a new outfit for the occasion. And here is a new journal for you from your sister Rachael," he said, as he picked up the red book from underneath the newspaper. "We're all incredibly proud of you." His eyes glittered with sudden humor. "You might even want to use your free evening cell phone minutes to call her and say thank you. Oh, and by the way, you can invite your friend to come with us if you want to."

Mary's jaw dropped. She didn't know what to say. Her dad had surprised her in so many ways! She was relieved that he knew about the awards ceremony and the cell phone and wasn't upset, but now she had a new problem. Which friend was her dad referring to, Mrs. Deno, Jessica, or Jose?

1. What special gift did Mary give Mrs. Deno?

- A. Mary helped plan her meals for the week.
- B. Mary helped her win the senior center bake-off.
- C. Mary recorded her own poems on tape for Mrs. Deno.

2. Why was Mary nervous about something bad happening with Mrs. Deno's health?

- A. Mrs. Deno gave her the cell phone to be an emergency contact for her.
- B. Her grandmother had died of a heart attack when she was Mrs. Deno's age.
- C. She was used to being cautious and worried about people in general.

3. Why did Mary need to come up with a plan?

- A. She needed to tell her father about the award she won and her phone.
- B. She needed to talk to her father about her working for Mrs. Deno so much.
- C. She needed to figure out which friend to take to the awards ceremony.

4. When did Mary find out she'd won an award at school?

- A. After her dad told her Aunt Suzie had told him about it.
- B. After helping Mrs. Deno with the senior center bake-off.
- C. After she got the cell phone as a gift from Mrs. Deno.

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- 5. Why was Mary taking a long walk home instead of going to Mrs. Deno's?**
- A. Mrs. Deno was out of town visiting a friend.
 - B. Mary was avoiding having to talk with her dad.
 - C. Mary wanted to enjoy the sunshine and fresh air.
- 6. Why did Mary assume she was in trouble when she got home?**
- A. Because she was hiding secrets she thought she was supposed to share.
 - B. Because her dad was home early and called her by her full name.
 - C. Because she was late due to taking the long way home from school.
- 7. What was the relationship between Mary and Mrs. Deno?**
- A. Assistant and neighbor.
 - B. Friend and mentor.
 - C. Employee and employer.
- 8. Why did Mrs. Deno give Mary the cell phone?**
- A. So Mary could talk with her friends when her dad was out.
 - B. It was less expensive to give her a present than pay her.
 - C. So Mary could be her emergency contact if she needed her.
- 9. Why did Mary say that Aunt Suzie was gossiping?**
- A. She knew that her Aunt Susie liked to cause trouble whenever she could.
 - B. She wanted to be the one to tell her dad about the award she had won.
 - C. She was trying to avoid talking about the award ceremony with her dad.
- 10. Why did Mary want to keep her feelings for Jose a secret from her dad?**
- A. She thinks he would be too busy for such small matters.
 - B. She feels it would be too embarrassing to talk about.
 - C. She was afraid she would get into trouble for dating.

- 11. What was the first reason Mary thought of for refusing to take the cell phone Mrs. Deno gave to her?**
- A. Taking the phone would mean Mrs. Deno might get sick.
 - B. She remembered her dad told her not to accept handouts.
 - C. It felt too grown up for her to carry a cell phone of her own.
- 12. What was Mary's main problem in the story?**
- A. She needed to tell her father some things and wasn't sure how to.
 - B. She hadn't practiced her speech for the awards ceremony enough.
 - C. She needed to decide which friend to bring to the awards ceremony.
- 13. What was Mary's dad like?**
- A. He was too busy to think about or care about how his family was doing.
 - B. He thought work was more important than what his daughter was doing.
 - C. He was stressed because he was a single dad with not much spare time.
- 14. What did Mary like to do most for Mrs. Deno?**
- A. Help her win the baking contest.
 - B. Record books on tape for her.
 - C. Go shopping for groceries with her.
- 15. Why was Mary surprised at the end of the story?**
- A. Her father already knew about the cell phone and award.
 - B. Her father didn't care that she was keeping secrets from him.
 - C. She got a gift of a new journal from her sister in college.
- 16. Which of the following is the best example of how Mary felt about working with Mrs. Deno?**
- A. She wished she could have a grandmother like Mrs. Deno.
 - B. She hummed to herself when making the cell phone manual.
 - C. She went to the senior center with Mrs. Deno after winning the bake-off.

17. What was a secret that Mrs. Deno knew about Mary that only one other person knew?
- A. Mary had a crush on someone.
 - B. Mary got an award at school.
 - C. Mary knew how to program a cell phone.
18. What was the main idea of the story?
- A. Secrets aren't always a bad thing to have.
 - B. Secrets can cause big problems with your family.
 - C. Secrets can cause a lot of unnecessary stress.
19. How did Mary try to avoid talking to her father about her cell phone and award when she got home from her walk?
- A. She tried to sneak upstairs before her father noticed her.
 - B. She tried to divert the discussion to talk about Aunt Suzie.
 - C. She tried to avoid making any eye contact with her father.
20. Who would Mary probably invite to the award ceremony?
- A. Jose.
 - B. Jessica.
 - C. Mrs. Deno.