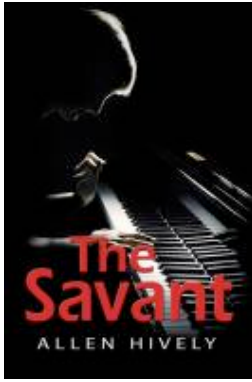


The Savant

ALLEN HIVELY



Sixteen-year-old Peter Shaw is a savant, a brilliant musician, and wants to be like every other kid his age. He finds solace in two things - music and his love for Amy Stevens. Amy's mother, Abigail, is against the union and forbids Amy from seeing Peter again. Their love is put to an unspeakable test when Amy's mother proves she will do anything to keep her and Peter apart.

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Second Edition

Dedication

To everyone who has loved, lost, and found love again.

Chapter 1

Kelly

I met Peter Allen Shaw on my twelfth birthday. He was tall with long curly brown hair and had a smile to die for. Until that day boys just weren't very interesting to me and even though it may have been a childish crush. There was something about him that stirred my interest. What made that awkward. Peter was my sister's boyfriend and for the first time in my life. I experienced envy. Being sixteen—Amy could date and I couldn't. Life seemed especially unfair at twelve. I was too young to do adult stuff, and too old to do kid stuff.

Peter wasn't just an ordinary handsome boy, he was a musical savant. I didn't know until later what that meant but being a savvy young lady with awesome computer skills. I found my answer on the internet. I learned that most savants were autistic and unable to take care of themselves. Those who were lucky enough to have strong families would live at home their entire lives. The less fortunate ended up in assisted living facilities. Most of them struggled with social anxiety making it difficult to maintain a close bond with anyone. Peter was one in a million. He could function socially and had a great family.

It seemed like my big day always hit during the week. So when I realized it would be on a Saturday this year. I was very excited. I guess my birthday party was typical for a girl my age. The boys stood on one side of the room talking about boy stuff and the girls stuck to the other side—pretending to not notice them. I had no clue what the boys talked about but my girlfriends giggled and gossiped about the boys, the cute new music teacher at school and clothes. I pretended to listen

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but my attention stayed on Amy and Peter. They sat on the bench of our old Steinway grand piano, holding hands, smiling, and talking in quiet tones. Smitten with curiosity, I had a sudden interest to know what people in love said to each other. Even at the tender age of twelve, it was easy to recognize what love looked like. Their eyes danced over each other with a sweet and innocent affection, much like characters I'd read about in a love story, late at night, with a flashlight under my covers...

Abigail Stevens, our mother, was a self-made woman. It wasn't a surprise when she didn't show up for my birthday party—she was always working. Abigail put herself through law school, which I considered an amazing achievement, but according to her, it only meant she had to work harder and longer than anyone else... So, it was rare for her to be home, even on special occasions. I guess you could say Amy ended up being my full-time sister and fill-in mom.

I don't remember much about my father. If not for the abundance of photos throughout the house, it would be hard to recall what he looked like. He died in a motorcycle wreck when I was five. The funeral is really the only thing I remember about him. I guess that's because everyone cried all day, ate, then continued to cry. I had never seen so much food in our house, and considering the occasion, I hoped to never see it again. I don't get how food is supposed to keep you from being sad.

After the funeral, it was just us girls—until Peter showed up. From that moment on my sister/best friend didn't have much time for me. She spent most of her free time with Peter somewhere else. Of course, I understood... Sort of—after all I *was* twelve going on sixteen. Amy and I were very close despite our age difference. When we did talk she went on and on about his phenomenal talent in music.

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Anyway, back to my party... Once we'd consumed the cake and ice cream and I had opened the token gifts. My little soirée began to lose its cohesion fast. If something interesting didn't happen soon, my party would be over and I'd be entertaining myself. So—I did what any pain-in-the-ass little sister would do and solicited the aid of my big sister's boyfriend.

As I walked toward her, we made eye contact—Amy's eyes rolled in contempt. She knew I was going to ask Peter to play something before I could make the short trek from the kitchen to the adjoining living room. Before I could get the request out of my mouth, Amy pantomimed zipping her lips closed and throwing away the key—her signal for me to run along and shut up. Then it happened... Peter must have felt the imaginary darts flying between Amy and me. In that brief moment, he looked up and smiled... at me. I'll never forget the happy look on his face but it was his eyes that locked me up. They were a deep blue color—like the sky in October. I looked into his eyes and tried to speak but nothing came out.

Oh my God! I thought.

My big moment had arrived, and I had gone mute. Never in my life had I been tongue-tied. If anything I talked too much. The destruction of my personal coolness was like watching a bad silent movie. My jaws jacked up and down like an automaton but Peter had no subtitles to understand me. I wanted to crawl into a cave until I was really old... like thirty or something... and then he spoke to me.

“Hey, Kelly, what's up?” he asked. His eyes sparkled with kindness but that didn't help.

Automaton... Yep—the jaws even failed me and then I imagined how stupid I looked just standing there. I started worrying that my affliction might be permanent and that I wouldn't be able to talk again. I struggled to catch my breath

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and figure out what to say. Instead he saved me from my temporary panic attack.

“Would you mind if I played a song for your birthday? I wrote it last night just for you.”

Oh my God! I thought.

Now my mouth shut tighter than a clamshell. The lip-smacking stopped but I still couldn't talk. I did manage to nod my head like one of those stupid toys people put in the back deck of their cars. There I stood, a speechless bobble-head, making an awesome first impression. I guess he understood my yes as my head bounced around in excitement.

“Cool...” He said. “Sorry I haven't worked out the words yet, but it's your song.” He smiled mischievously, then turned to the keyboard and started to play.

For the very first time in my life, I was jealous of my sister twice in one day. The song started and Amy put her arm around him and laid her head on his shoulder... as he played *my* song! It sounded so familiar though... Kind of similar to that crappy classical music my grandmother liked. But I didn't even think about complaining—it was *my* song after all. It danced around many styles and eventually made its way to a classic rock sound. I was a nut for the older rock-and-roll stuff, something Amy and I had in common. But then it hit me... It was like a grade-school recital that had gone bad. Peter was playing *Happy Birthday to you*. My heart sank. There I stood, in the middle of the family room, in front of my closest friends, with a deer-in-the-headlights look, swooning like a schoolgirl. Of course, several years later I realized... duh... I was a schoolgirl, but it still took me a long time to forgive Peter. My song indeed—oh how cool... the twerp! I didn't realize, or appreciate, until much later, the talent it took to blend three different genres of music into a simple little tune.

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Later that night, Amy came to my bedroom. She knocked on the door and poked her head in. I threw my favorite stuffed monkey at her, but instantly regretted it... It wasn't really Mr. Jangles fault! Amy walked in anyway, uninvited, picked up Mr. Jangles, and sat him on my bed.

"Kelly, I understand how your feelings got hurt, but Peter really did put quite a bit of thought into your birthday song. I know you have a crush on him, and if you weren't my sister, I would have to smash you into little pieces."

That made me smile. I loved that even when I was completely mad, Amy could always help me get over it. Her empathetic smile faded into the serious look she had when she wanted me to do something for her.

"I need a huge favor... But it has to be a secret, between you and me" she said.

Every time my sister prefaced a favor involving a secret, it meant she wanted to do something without our mother's knowledge. Even though Mom was gone a lot, she had an uncanny ability to show up when we least expected it. On those rare occasions that one of us broke the house rules, we covered for each other, of course when we were caught, we both suffered the punishment. Usually Amy just wanted to stay out a little later than Mom's mandatory 11:00 curfew. Not this time.

"Mom got home just a little bit ago and told me she is leaving again on Friday morning, and won't be back until Monday. I convinced her we didn't need anyone to stay over and that we would be fine. It's the perfect opportunity for Peter and I to drive up to Chicago."

"Chicago?!" I shouted loud enough to wake the dead.

"Shush! Mom will hear you. Yes ... Chicago," she said quietly. "I convinced Peter that he needs to go to a music studio and record some of his stuff."

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“Isn’t that, like, expensive?” I asked, really proud of my adult-like observation.

“It runs about fifty dollars an hour. I’ve already booked six hours for Saturday,” she said.

“That’s three hundred dollars. How are you going to come up with that kind of money? Wait a minute. Why don’t you just go to Dallas? It’s an hour away. Chicago will take like forever to drive there.”

Amy just rolled her eyes—like she always did when she had a plan and no interest in my voice of reason.

“Because, little sister, to make it big in music, it’s either Chicago or Los Angeles, and there’s not enough time to drive to California. I googled it and it’s only going to take about fourteen hours. Peter and I pooled our money. We have over five hundred dollars between us. It will be more than enough to make the trip.”

“Fourteen hours!” The shock and awe of my sister’s plans became seriously clear. “Amy... that means you’ll have to spend the night... in a motel... with a boy. Have you lost your mind?”

Amy immediately bowed up like a petulant little princess. “First of all, we are planning to leave Friday evening and drive straight through. And if we’re too tired to drive all the way home, then sure, we’ll spend the night somewhere. Good grief Kelly, it’s no big deal. It would just be to sleep. It’s not like we’re going to, well, you know... do it or anything.”

“I think I’m going to be sick.” I rolled over to the other side of the bed to hide my smiling face and pretended to throw up with what I thought was an extraordinarily well done dramatic production.

“Kelly... would you stop? I’m trying to have a serious conversation, and you’re acting like a kid.”

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“Uh... I am a kid,” I said.

“You only act like a kid when it’s a convenient distraction that steers the conversation in another direction. Now... tell me the real reason you are dishing out grief instead of being supportive,” Amy said.

I could never figure out how my sister knew my thoughts before I even knew I had an opinion. It took me a while to sort out the answer. Amy made it even harder for me to concentrate as she stood there with her arms crossed, tapping a foot, just like Mom did. And then I realized what really scared me. I sat up in my bed, and even though I knew there was no reason for it, tears welled up and started their way down my cheeks. Embarrassed, I tried to mop them up with the sleeves of my pajamas, but it was too late to cover up my emotions. Amy sat down on the edge of my bed and took my hands in hers.

“What’s the matter, sis?”

“Well, we both know Peter is really good, and when he gets a recording contract, then everyone else is going to know how good he is, and then he’ll become famous, and since you’re his girlfriend, you’ll be famous too and I’ll never see you again.”

Of course, I blubbered and sobbed through the whole discourse, so it took like forever to spit it out. My most vivid memory of that night was Amy’s sweet attitude and what she said.

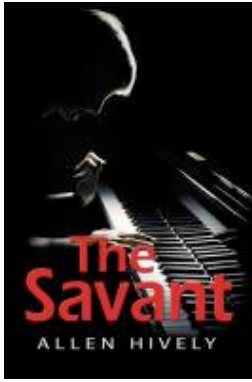
“Oh, Kelly... being famous is what you make of it. If a person wants to have time for their family, then they will make time no matter how popular or busy they might become. You’re my family, and I love you.”

She smiled, and it made me feel better. At least I quit crying. Mission accomplished there. We hugged, and Amy went off to bed. I tried to go to sleep, but in my heart, I knew

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that a big change was coming to our lives—and my mom was already too busy for me. How would I deal with my sister being gone all the time as well?

Friday came quicker than usual and I remember thinking how ironic that was. I should have been really excited. My mom and sister would both be gone for the weekend. I went through the motions and invited a couple of my best friends over but they were more excited about the prospect of no supervision than I was. Mom left around noon, clueless of the deceit and debauchery about to encase the Stevens home. Peter showed up about an hour later in his old Toyota Corolla. He banged on the door and let himself in. Even he acted somewhat awkward. Amy came downstairs with just the backpack that she took with her everywhere. She gave me a hug and proceeded to do the maternal thing, instructing me on how late I could stay up and what types of foods were in the fridge. When she finished, I turned it all around and pretty much told her what to do and when to do it. We showed each other our cell phones at the same time and giggled. I guess knowing that we were just a phone call away made us both feel a little better. Then in what seemed like seconds, they disappeared down the road, bound for Chicago.



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