



## *Cloth of Heaven- Song of Erin- Book 1*

by B.J. Hoff

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New York City, 1839

“He hurt you, didn’t he?”

Samantha tensed, at first thinking she’d misunderstood him. “What?”

“Your husband. He hurt you. That’s why it’s so difficult for you to talk about him.”

An alarm went off in Samantha. What had she said...what had he seen that could have given it away?

The humiliation flooding over her made her want to leap to her feet and run away. From Jack...from the hospital...from the pain. Somehow he had glimpsed her secret shame.

He knew....

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Jack didn’t miss the trembling of her hands or the way she had begun to press her arms against her midsection as if to hold herself together.

He wished he dared take her hand. “I’m sorry,” he said softly.

“Yes...well, it’s...over now.”

Jack thought that was a strange way to put it. He said nothing, but the suspicion that had begun to form in his mind reasserted itself. When he thought of how concerned—how intense—she had been about the Shanahan woman and her problems, the peculiar silence she maintained in regard to her deceased husband, and most especially, the stricken look

that came over her at the mention of his name, he could not help but wonder if the late Bronson Harte had really been the saint he was reputed to be.

He was seriously beginning to doubt it.

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“You can tell me about it, Samantha,” he said quietly. “If you want to, that is. If not—I understand. But at least know that you don’t have to pretend with me any longer.”

She said nothing but merely sat there, straight-backed and unmoving, her lips pressed together as she deliberately avoided looking at him. Even now, despite the cloak of denial she had drawn about her, Jack could see the despair in her eyes, and the sight of it hit him like a blow. More than ever before, he wished he could hold her...hold her so closely he could somehow absorb her pain into himself so that she would feel nothing—nothing but his love for her.

His love for her. It was the first time he had allowed the word to identify his feelings for Samantha, even though he had feared for some time now the direction in which those feelings were headed.

So that was the way of it, then. He loved her. The admission astonished him.

It also terrified him....

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