

# A Dark Secret

Inside all of us, lies a dark secret.

*6.30pm, Haworth, West Yorkshire, England.*

He tucked his chin firmly inside the upturned collar of his old overcoat. Instead of his favorite cashmere coat, he was wearing a grubby coat made of plastic. This old coat had kept him warm throughout his University days. He felt he needed to dress down; his cashmere coat would look out of place, in this hard hit community. He fixed his stare upon the steep climb ahead. The cobbled street seemed to mirror his life since Carrie had died; a steep climb. Haworth was a beautiful village, nestled within the Yorkshire moors, in Northern England. It was not his first visit, he recalled being here with Carrie, in happier times.

The wind was fierce, tinged with a cold biting edge. The locals recognized this sign; a storm was advancing over the moors. With each labored step, the sky grew darker. He failed to notice the street lamps crackling into life. They bled their dull orange glow into the creeping fog. Carrie would have made this fun, bounding up the cobbled street, pulling him by the hand. He pressed onwards. He could now see the top of the incline; he was close. The famous Black Bull pub came into sight.

A warm welcoming glow emanated from one of its small windows. He could hear laughter from within. The locals were safely inside enjoying the hospitality. They had intimate knowledge of how the weather worked across the moors.

The biting wind slapped his face as he peered out from the hood of his coat. He turned his back to the wind, affording him an impressive view of Haworth Main Street. On this dark windy night, the scene reminded him of a glorious moment from another age. It was as if he'd stepped back in time.

“A godforsaken place,” rang in his ears as the wind threatened to push him down the hill.

“I’m staying in Leeds, it’s not London, but it’s better than where you’re going.” His thoughts turned to Shawna, snarling as she said these words. He turned to face the wind and in a moment of realization, he frowned deeply. It was clear he needed to face the other storm brewing in his life. He was not happy. If he were being honest, he would describe his relationship as miserable.

Shawna was not right for him, he needed to end it and this visit had confirmed his suspicions. He was the famous Dr. David Harrington and he deserved to be happy. For the first time in months he felt relief. He harbored a dark secret from his past. It was churning his insides and haunting his dreams. He needed to tell someone what he'd done and he thought Shawna would be that person.

The Black Bull pub sign screeched as it rocked wildly upon its hinges. His eyes followed the slate steps leading to Haworth Church. His upturned face felt moisture in the wind announcing the coming rain. "Better get inside quickly," he thought. An arrangement of familiar letters seemed to draw his gaze. A red-framed sign, anchored by large rocks, displayed the following.

*Free lecture at the Church Hall tonight - Starts at 7pm*

*"How the Universe Works" by Dr. David Harrington*

*The Mountain of Thabor room*

*All guests are welcome*

His childhood friend had become a man of the cloth. While they had debated the meaning of life and the Church's role in it, he still remained his closest friend. When Carrie died, the Vicar was the first to arrive and stayed until he could cope. This was an act that he would never forget. He'd phoned to inform the Vicar of his visit to Leeds.

"It would be so nice to see you. If you could come and visit, then I promise I'd fill the hall with parishioners. They'd love to hear a lecture from you and it would score me some serious points. His rival, the Vicar Aldridge, had never managed to get a celebrity to visit."

He reluctantly agreed and was now stuck in a windswept Victorian village, with a storm beckoning. He looked down at the cobbles and kicked a loose one with one of his hand crafted Italian Salvatore Ferragamo's. He was procrastinating. He'd delivered his lecture numerous times, but now he had to face his old friend, a man of the cloth. How could he act normal knowing what he'd done? He harbored such a terrible secret. A voice inside his head screamed, "Run and don't come back. Blame the weather."

He was tempted, but a strange force compelled him to continue. He couldn't explain why, but he knew he must deliver this lecture. Was he doing this to spite Shawna or was there something deeper? Despite the weather, he was determined to deliver the lecture and do a great job. Larger forces were at play here. It was not for him to understand or even question his feelings. He just felt compelled to do this and do it well. He had to put his dark secret aside and head immediately towards the lecture hall.

"Come in quickly love, before that wind whips your head off!" David peered into the doorway to see the rounded, ample face, of a cheery woman. She was propping the door open while fighting the strong wind.

"Thanks," he mumbled, pushing his way into the long corridor leading to the lecture hall.

He walked inside and was pleasantly surprised to see a crowd of people milling around. On a night like this, he feared many would stay warm in the comfort of their own homes.

"Well, look who's here," was the relieved shout from the corridor. David recognized the

voice instantly. Shaking from the damp cold, he lifted his face to see his old friend Mark, dressed in full Vicar attire.

“I like your dog collar,” David said with a mischievous smirk.

“Come on in, so you can get warm. I’ve got a pot of coffee brewing,” said Mark, hugging his dear friend. David followed into a small side room that appeared to be an office. The two friends sat, as David combed his flattened hair with his fingers.

He tossed his coat casually; it caught the back of the chair, bending in half. It was a decent throw but as the overcoat folded, the top half fell towards the floor. An old bus ticket fell to the ground unnoticed, from the shallow top pocket. It was a single fare clearly showing the date and time of purchase. The ticket recorded a journey taken many years ago from Keighley to Skipton.

David crossed his legs, smiled and tried to look calm. His stomach was in knots. He needed to get through this and remember that Mark knew nothing. Mark poured the coffee and pushed a steaming hot cup across the table.

“Black, just how you like it.”

“Cheers buddy or should I call you Vicar now?”

“It’s so good to see you David. I can’t tell you how grateful I am, that you agreed to do this.”

“Don’t mention it, I wanted to see you. All kidding aside you look good, you really do. Does this life make you happy?”

“It does, I like the Church, I like the village, I’m really happy here. You being here will help me no end. We have a great crowd tonight, despite the weather. At first, people thought I was joking; many are expecting a look-a-like imposter. They’ll be stunned when they see it’s really you.”

David studied Mark as he spoke, he felt guilty and ashamed. Mark was a great guy, a pillar of the community. They had met in school and soon were great friends. Mark was a smart guy with a quick mind. He was a skilled communicator, who could charm the ladies. He was in his thirties when he decided to join the Church. They had discussed this idea, as students, rooming together in Keighley. At the time David had thought it a stupid idea and a waste of Mark’s talents. David now felt guilty for hiding his secret from a man of the cloth. The pristine white dog collar, shone in his face, like an accusing interrogation room spotlight.

“Mark, I’m glad to be here, but I did want to apologize about our row,” stammered David.

“Don’t mention it. It’s water under the bridge now that you’re here.” A small white lie delivered with authority, as only a Vicar could. The row was a deep, hurtful one. It caused two friends to remain silent for over a decade. There are many things a man can do. All men understand the unwritten rule. You don’t pursue your best friend’s girl.

Mark had introduced Carol to David, as his new girlfriend. David pursued her relentlessly for over a year, following that brief initial encounter. Suspicions were raised when Carol broke up with Mark and started to date David. Had something been going on?

Did David play Mark for a fool? Carol was the only woman Mark had ever loved. Although they had discussed it many times, David insisted that he had remained loyal to his friend. He had only developed feelings for Carol, after they had separated. Many years ago, on a night similar to tonight, the rain soaked the narrow roads of West Yorkshire. David had gone for a walk on the moors.

He told the police that he needed to clear his head for an upcoming exam and welcomed the fresh air. Mark had thought this odd, for three reasons. David hated walking anywhere, especially in the rain. He despised being alone and always sought out company. Finally, David knew better than to walk alone across the moors at night with a storm moving in. It was Mark who got the call that fateful night. Carol had been in an accident and her car had collided with a dry-stone wall. Carol had died in a remote part of Skipton. The investigation was covered by the local media and speculation followed. Some peculiar facts had surfaced, which raised doubts.

Carol was found in the drivers seat but one of her shoes was found in the passenger side foot well. A dog walking witness thought she had seen a man running from the scene. She told police, that she thought the car had swerved to avoid a fox. The reporters suggested that speeding was the main factor for the accident. The car had slammed into a wall and the local press spun a good story. They suggested the driver escaped and fled the scene. Before he left he had positioned Carol's body into the driver's seat. The act of moving her caused one of her shoes to fall off.

For months, the press and the locals cast the long shadow of doubt over David. It was a horrible time for him, but Mark remained his staunch defender. David had walked the moors alone with no alibi. That night, many saw Mark having a drink at the Black Bull pub. As time marched on, the case grew cold and interest in Carol Barnby waned. David carved out a career as an author and renown speaker. Mark was left devastated by Carol's death; he loved her dearly. It caused a rift between Mark and David. David always felt that Mark suspected him; it was a creepy feeling. David had repeatedly told the police that he was walking the moors that night. He was nowhere near Skipton and clearly that ruled him out of any wrongdoing. After a while, he couldn't bare being around Mark. David left Keighley for the bright lights of London and a new life.

When Carrie died of cancer, David was devastated. His strength came from an unusual place. David never forgot Mark's act of kindness and was determined to help Mark make a good start in his posting to Haworth Church.

“Finished your coffee yet?” inquired Mark.

“Yes. Thanks, I needed a warm drink on a night like this.”

“Are you ready to go and mingle with the crowd before your lecture starts?”

“That’ll be fun,” said David being deceitful. David grabbed his beaten up coat and walked with Mark to the lecture hall.

As they left the room, Mark closed the door to his office. The draft from the hallway swept along the floor and lifted the old faded bus ticket. In a cruel twist of fate, it blew the ticket from its hiding place under the chair. It finally came to rest in the center of the room. In its new location, Mark would not fail to notice the small, yellow, bus ticket. It was such an obvious contrast against the black linoleum floor covering.

The End .....

A Short Story by Phil Armstrong.

This short story is a unique piece of work featuring the fictional character of Dr. David Harrington, from the novel “2 Promises,” written by Phil Armstrong.

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