

Twenty-one short stories that bring the reader within reach of reality, only to slip on a rock in the stream of uncertainty. Stories told of the unseen and seen with a maze of twists that interlace with improbabilities, which eventually reveals fiction is sometimes the truth. Even if only in one's mind.

WHISPERS FROM THE ATTIC

By Stephen Hobbs

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THE ATTIC

Stephen Hobbs

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Chapter two

Tom watched as Carl walked to a giant cedar and stood quietly. He bowed his head, then reached out as though to touch something, and then slowly lowered his hand. The hair on the nape of Tom's neck began to rise. He knew others were watching. Others they cannot see except maybe for Carl, as he walked the length of the cemetery as if in deep conversation with something unseen.

Meanwhile, the backhoe operator had stopped, and the hill became quiet, as workers watched Carl. He had walked the length of the hill and was now on his way back. He left the newer section and stopped between two marked graves, or instead, he stopped at an unmarked grave between the two. Standing a moment, he turned and walked to the tent and returned to his original spot and inserted a surveyor's flag into the soil. The flag stood in between the two marked graves.

Without a word, Carl walked back to the backhoe and tested the soil with his rod and gave the depth to continue. Two more scoops and the backhoe went quiet as the handwork began.

Tom looked at Carl, knowing when Carl was in the zone to say nothing. Carl finally looked at Tom with sadness in his eyes. Told by entities other mortals cannot see. Carl was troubled.

The work continued until the noon hour, and work stopped for lunch. Each worker is selected a day to stay at the job site to keep onlookers away. Today was Paul's day as he opened his lunch box. The rest left for a less sacred place to eat. Carl moved in the direction of the small village north of the interstate. Which had not grown in the last fifty years? Those who laid in the soil, once called home? Tom assumed he was going to verify what he had perceived, and the workers would wait until Carl returned if it means doing nothing for the rest of the day.

The ignored inspector sat close. He was not a problem unless he overstepped rules. The rules being, those on lunch break had done this for years, and efficient at what they do. He may ask a pertinent question, but let it be one of a rational thought process. Still no sign of Carl after the allotted hour, so they waited, and no one complained.

All dozed in the midday sun. Suddenly someone said, "Carl is coming." Tom raised his head, and Carl was coming up the last lane that a few others had traveled.

Carl stepped from the truck, and his expression had not changed. In his hand, Tom saw many sheets of paper. Of which the print appeared to be copies of originals.

They were equal here, and no man is less than the other was when Carl wished them to gather the workers responded. All looked up to Carl, and if he stopped, everyone else does. In a way, it was somewhat creepy if privileged to know Carl more

than what Tom had described, you would understand.

Thinking of Carl caused Tom to remember the day Carl approached him about the work wanted ad in a local newspaper and Tom's reaction to his verbal qualifications, but that should be an entirely different story.

The articles on the sheets of paper appeared copied from old newspaper clippings as Carl spread them out in front for all to see. He still had not spoken, and no one broke the silence. He moved pages around, and one could tell he was putting everything in chronological order.

Satisfied with his effort and organization, Carl looked up to make sure everyone is watching and listening. He said the name, "Jason B. Mason," and no one responded. Carl continued with his narrative, informed those gathered that Jason B. Mason was the only funeral director and embalmer in the small village for over forty years. Chose not only because he was the only one of his profession for miles, but also his compassion for the deceased.

Carl made eye contact with each other in the group. Then he continued by saying, "Someone in the community noticed a change had come over Jason B. Mason after some inappropriate actions with a decedent. The record did not state what those misdeeds were, but apparently, enough to cause some alarm throughout the community."

Carl took a deep breath and exhaled slowly.

Moments passed, and no one spoke, as everyone knew Carl would soon answer any question unasked, as he continued. "It seems that whatever

the deeds were, pertained to the services rendered by Jason B. Mason. Several improprieties occurred that were unacceptable, and Jason B. Mason was asked by some to leave the village and or stop his services to the families bereaved by the loss of a loved one. He refused for a time to do either.”

Carl explained that the papers he had spread before the group would attest to the public’s lack of confidence in Jason B. Mason’s abilities to perform his task of caring for the deceased. Carl handed a newspaper clipping to Tom. Tom read before passing it on to the rest of those standing in a semi-circle before Carl.

The article read individually, passed around the circle, and back to Carl what each of them read attested to the facts mentioned by Carl. What Carl said next was not only stunning but also probable. That the two empty graves were empty because of those improprieties, and no doubt, there would be others.

No one asked Carl how he had come to know the name of Jason B. Mason. Several months earlier, at a different job site, a new worker had requested of Carl what made him unique when it came to excavating, the dead. Carl never batted an eye as he told the young man of his grandparents and the color of his first bike, and the young man was stunned as to Carl knowing these things about him. James apologized to Carl, and Carl just put his hand on James’ shoulder and smiled.

Carl showed everyone the clipping from the paper where Jason B. Mason was to leave town or stop all work in the preparation of the dead for burial.

Under legal pressure, he chose to close his business but decided not to exit the village. “Which was satisfying to some of the locals, but was there some who felt otherwise?” Carl asked.

Everyone stood quietly, what did it matter now as a century had passed, in some cases, more than a century? Carl knows something that was not in the papers, as everyone watched him turn his gaze toward the surveyor’s flag.

It was James who spoke first, and in a quivering voice said, “No way, Carl. That grave is unmarked and between two others, but there is something buried there, isn’t there, Carl?”

Carl just shook his head, yes.

Everyone followed Carl as he picked up his copper rod. At the unmarked gravesite, in between the two that were marked, stuck the metal into the ground and then pushed, and Tom knew everyone there heard the clunk. Carl stood for a minute as if he did not believe it himself, and then he removed the rod.

Carl, with his eyes closed, said, “When exhumed, workers would find a lead coffin, and inside, we would find the human remains of Jason B. Mason.”

No one argued with his statement. Carl spoke again and said, “There would be a note addressed to Jason B. Mason from the town’s people as to his crimes against humankind.” Also, he would be in a weird position. Even Carl frowned at that deduction as if that would be impossible to believe.

The rectangular shield set, Carl turned the first shovel, and then the backhoe came to life. At four

strokes, Carl raised his hand, and the backhoe stopped. Carl checked, and the backhoe went quiet as the exhumation began. Once cleared, a tripod reverently erected, as the box wrapped in chain slowly as if not wanting, began to rise from the damp earth.

The weight made the block and tackled scream as if in mortal agony, as the lead box spun and sat across the opening. Placed on rollers and rolled to the white tent, Carl wanted to be alone, but then he asked James to enter the shelter as a witness.

Everyone on the outside winced at each sound of the chisel, breaking bolt after bolt, and then the silence deafening. Then James stepped outside the tent, white in composure as the tent itself, and they knew Carl was right. James walked past Tom and said very quietly, "Carl wished to see him inside."

Tom walked what seemed a hundred miles from where he stood, to the inner tent. Carl rose to read a crumpled note, as Tom focused on him instead of the raised lid of the lead coffin. Carl looked at Tom, and for the first time, Tom saw tears in Carl's eyes. Tom asked if he found that which he had envisioned.

He said, "Yes," hesitating, he said, "And much more."

Tom looked at the mortal remains of Jason B. Mason, and he was in the fetal position on his knees, and Carl had the note, so what else is there?

Carl knew what Tom was thinking, and said, "Look at the lining!"

It was then Tom noticed the inner lining was torn and tattered, and Tom knew then why Jason B. Mason, was in the fetal position.

Justice served, or was this just murder?

Carl spoke quietly and said there would be a final judgment, and then we shall see if this was justified, as he placed the note within and slowly closed the lid on the lead coffin.

Workers finished the removals several days later without incident but for the finding of many empty graves. Tom was not privy to the note, Carl had read.

Moreover, Carl never mentioned the script on the crumpled paper.

A year had passed, Tom had won another bid, so Tom called Carl, hanging up the phone, and Tom heard Carl softly praying.

I have since left Carl after thanking him personally for his being clairvoyant. The narration above is as I correctly recall. I am opposed to the incident one-hundred and twenty years ago, which was so evil.

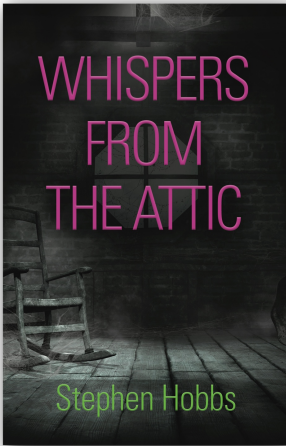
It was murder, and the descendants of them who orchestrated my demise still live.

Trapped in the flesh and more so spiritually, is not forgivable. Now no longer confined, I will come and go as I please amongst those who live with an ancestor's guilt and walk the very hallways of lives and homes unseen.

Stephen Hobbs

They will remember, or my name is not

“JASON BRUCE MASON!”



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