

# WARTORN

BY DAVID SHIPLEY

CHAPTER 2

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## CHAPTER 2

Rebecca gave birth to a boy in June 1922. There would be no legal adoption in Britain for another four years, so there were no formalities to go through. The child, who Rebecca named Hubert, would in fact be adopted but for legal reasons and not for another sixteen years, by which time everyone called him Peter. Rebecca, Florence and the baby took the bus into Buxton. Only Rebecca and Florence came back. Florence kept a bottle of brandy in the house for medicinal purposes. She poured a large glass and handed it to Rebecca. A glance from his wife stopped Henry when he was about to take a glass for himself. Florence said, 'Take the rest of the day off, Rebecca. You and I will eat at the New Inn this evening. Henry, you'll find bread and cheese in the pantry.'

Adoption, when the child is even a few months old can go badly wrong. But Hubert had lived for only two days. There was no shortage of brothers and sisters in the house. One sister, Evelyn who was known as Eva, had just started a job at the Ferodo brake lining company, but when she wasn't at work, she delighted in taking care of the little ones at home. That was probably how she came some years later to be matron at Ferodo, but Hubert knew none of this. As far as he was concerned, Mrs Shipley was his mother and Eva was his big sister. And they cared for him. This was not some Dickensian Dotheboys Hall – every child in Mrs Shipley's care thrived.

That was more than you could say for Buxton in general at the time. In the eighteenth century, the Duke of Devonshire wanted to make it a spa town to

rival Bath, but that had always been a dream. Buxton was too high up, too exposed, too windswept and too subject to rain. The real money went to Bath, to Cheltenham and to Harrogate. The Wedgwoods took to Buxton, but what does someone from Stoke know?

Still, it was a better hometown than many. And Hubert showed promise.

An Education Act four years before he was born made education of all children compulsory up to the age of fourteen, and there were grammar schools that could prepare boys – and some girls – for great things, but most children of all but the most well-off parents stayed in elementary school till they were fourteen and then looked for a job. When Hubert was ten, the headmaster at his elementary school asked Mrs Shipley to visit him. ‘The boy is able,’ he said.

Mrs Shipley knew that. You don’t look after a gifted child for ten years and not know what you’ve got. But life was tough. She said, ‘The most intelligent person I’ve ever met was my uncle from Durham. Not the cleverest – you need education to be clever – but the most intelligent. His father was a miner. His older brothers were miners. My uncle started down the pit when he was twelve. He’s still the most intelligent person I’ve ever met, but...’ She shrugged. What could you do?

‘I know all that,’ said the head. ‘Not your uncle, but in general... If that’s how it has to be with Hubert Shipley, I’m sure he’ll make a fist of whatever he does. But...’

The head's difficulty was that he knew Mrs Shipley was not Hubert's mother, but there was a convention that nobody voiced that thought. Mrs Shipley helped him out. 'What do you suggest?'

'He ought to be taking the Kent's Bank scholarship. There's an exam two weeks from now I could put him in for. I'm minded to do that. But the scholarship does not pay all his fees and what's the point of getting his hopes up if the difference can't be found? If his father can't...' He let the silence run. There was a good chance Mrs Shipley knew the father's identity, but that information was not available to him.

Mrs Shipley said, 'I'll see what I can do. There's someone I can talk to. Leave it with me.'

'I'm happy to do that, Mrs Shipley. I'll say again – the exam is two weeks away.'

'I understand. We need a fast decision.'

\* \* \*

Mrs Shipley wrote to Florence. There were at that time two deliveries a day, and a letter posted in Buxton by six in the evening would be delivered to Quarnford next morning. And Florence was, after all, the postmaster's wife. When the letter arrived, she discussed it first with Rebecca. Henry was next. He said, 'Why can't he leave school at fourteen like anyone else?'

'He's your son. Harry Barlow's son has been at the grammar for three years. Ted Vernon's boy went there last year. Are you telling me that two farmers' sons have a right to a grammar school education and a postmaster's son doesn't?'

'Nobody knows he's my...'

'They will, if you don't make the decent decision here.'

A letter went back to Mrs Shipley that same day, and next morning Hubert carried to school a note telling the headmaster to go ahead and book the scholarship examination. Whatever the costs, they would be met.