

# WARTORN

BY DAVID SHIPLEY

CHAPTER 3

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## CHAPTER 3

1936 *BUXTON, DERBYSHIRE*

Harry Barlow's son had not passed the scholarship examination and Harry Barlow had to pay the fees in full. The same was true of Ted Vernon and his son. But Hubert Shipley, who by now for some forgotten reason everyone called Peter, walked it. He got the highest possible percentage of his fees paid. That didn't stop Henry Clarke grumbling, but he did so without conviction. 'My son,' he said. 'A genius. What else would you expect?'

Florence said, 'If you go on like that, people will hear you. They'll know what you did to Rebecca. You should be talking about how ashamed you are, not how proud.'

Rebecca heard these exchanges. She had her own view about where Peter's brains came from. She kept it to herself.

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A school for boys in their teens is a place of competition. That's especially true when the boys have successful fathers. Buxton in 1936 was a small town where everyone knew everyone else's business. Parents talked, and sons listened, and Kent's Bank pupils knew exactly what the surname Shipley meant. They knew Mrs Shipley wasn't really Peter's mother. And if the other boys knew, so did Peter. There might have been one of his classmates too kind to tell him his own truth. That he was a bastard who Mrs Shipley had not borne but took care of

for money. There might even have been two. But if there were they were outnumbered by those who thought it their duty to tell the facts of his life to a scholarship boy who wouldn't have been one of their number if he'd had to pay the same fees their parents paid. In class-ridden Buxton, those were significant strikes against him.

There were other things that could have made his problems even worse. Academically, he was always in the top three and quite often top in his class in every subject. That made him a swot, and boys everywhere looked down on swots. And he sang – so well that the St. John's Church choir snapped him up. He could have got away with that, but the school music master regularly called on him to perform in assembly and gave him the leading role when Kent's Bank staged a Gilbert and Sullivan operetta. They might as well have hung a sign around his neck saying:

KICK ME!

But none of that told the whole story. A good sportsman could get away with being a bastard, of the wrong class, who sang like an angel and was academically gifted, and Peter *was* good. In those days, each season was very clearly defined and if you played football even three days into the cricket season, or cricket three days into the football season, you would be ridiculed. So Peter played centre half in winter and kept wicket in summer and was first choice in his year from the age of twelve onwards. Which, on the right-hand pan of the boys' secondary school weigh-scale, more than outweighed the negatives on the left.

See him now, making his way home to Mrs Shipley's, carrying his bat and his wicket-keeping gloves bought from Lillywhites of Piccadilly and paid for by a man he has never met, never heard named, but who he knows must exist. He isn't alone. Ted, opening batsman and Brian, off-spin bowler, walk with him. They don't live with Mrs Shipley; they have homes to go to that are looked after by mothers, with the money brought home by the fathers the mothers are married to. Walking with Peter to Mrs Shipley's takes Ted and Brian out of their way. But that's okay, Buxton is bathed in sunshine, it's July and the last week of term, no homework tonight, the summer holidays loom and the sporting elite have things to talk about. That's probably also true of the academic elite, but Peter has access to both and knows which of the two groups he prefers spending time with.

And then there are the girls. Girls don't bother with swots but being seen with sportsmen is worth investing time in. And no boy as good-looking as Peter has trouble drawing them to him. At last, they reach the Shipley door. Ted would like to spend a little longer soliciting Peter's help in getting him into Buxton Cricket Club where Peter, at only fourteen years old captains the Under 16s, but Peter is hungry and wants the Shippam's bloater paste sandwich and glass of milk Mrs Shipley lets him have to sustain him until it's time for his tea, a meal that in Ted's house is called dinner. Peter lets himself into the house. 'Bis später,' he says. He's learning German at school and he's very, very good at it. It's 1936 and he has no idea how useful that skill will be to him in a few short years.

When the holidays arrived, Peter spent a lot of time walking the hills and moorland around his home. Sometimes, one of the girls who often sought out his company wangled an invitation to go with him. They sometimes held hands and occasionally kissed, but nothing more than that. Peter knew what life was like for someone born out of wedlock. The girls didn't want to find out.

And sometimes he helped out on one or other of the farms that surrounded Buxton. Not for money, though the farmer's wife usually made sure he got half a crown or so, but to use the energy bursting out of him. And because he enjoyed it. He got something from doing hard physical work out in the open that he didn't get any other way.