



Pilcrow & Dagger

Conspiracy Theories

Facts and Fiction
with
Ian C. P. Irvine



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Roger Schumacher - Roger's early childhood was consumed by comic books, Creature Feature Presents, Star Trek, and Clint Eastwood films. In 1980 he attended the School of Visual Arts earning a film degree and then spent the rest of the 80's and 90's working on small film projects, screenplays, and other AV projects. Roger has been working with prose since 2003 and has taken some classes in order to better learn the craft. He is currently working as an Inventory Analyst.

Full Circle

We lay hidden in the tall grass that overlooked a large empty field. A small helicopter hovered over the tree line making its way toward them. Two pickup trucks with Park Ranger logos sat waiting for the helicopter to land.

Karen looked to me with a mix of wonder and trepidation. We'd been friends since grade school. And we were now on the cusp graduating high school. We spent most of our free time together. Our friendship had grown over the years from a love of delving into conspiracy theories. We debated everything from government cover-ups to the unknowns of space.

I always felt that somewhere along the line that our friendship should take the next step. I remembered when I worked up the courage to ask her to the prom, and her polite but cold refusal. I took that as she didn't feel the same way I did, and learned to accept things as they were.

"Rob, what do you think is going on?"

"I don't know Karen. Hey, look."

Two men got out of one of the pickup trucks and jogged toward the helicopter as it touched down. They came alongside the helicopter and retrieved a large container that looked like an igloo cooler. I could make out a strange symbol painted on the side.

Three triangles formed a pyramid with a ring around the outside of them.

They deposited the cooler into the back of one of the trucks as the helicopter rose from the ground. Within two minutes, the helicopter disappeared over the horizon while the trucks drove away.

"What do you make of that?"

For the first time since I've known my best friend, I saw fear in her eyes.

"We should go, the park will close soon."

"What about what we just saw?"

She didn't say anything as she stood from our hiding place. She began to walk toward the path where we came into the woods.

"What's wrong?"

I ran to catch up with her. I laid a hand on her shoulder. She turned and faced me with tears running down her face. Without another word, she hugged me tightly and held me. I could feel her shake with fear as my arms wrapped around her. She then ended the embrace.

"We should be going home. It's getting late."

"Karen what is it?"

She wouldn't answer; but simply turned and headed up the path.

Within a week Karen's family had moved away without explanation or telling anyone where they were headed. That day in the woods would be the last time I saw Karen.

Ten years have passed since that day in the field. After graduating from college, my

life path drew me away from small town conspiracies and into the bland world of accounting. My fascination with the unexplained took a back seat to the mind numbing day to day working experience of account balances, corporate funds, and numbers. But deep inside, beneath the swirling rise of money and hedge funds, my fascination with conspiracy theories would again take center stage.

Sitting at my desk, I began the morning ritual of going through my emails. Among the various work related hum-drum, one stood out. Not for what it contained, but who had sent it.

The subject line of the email contained “Hi Stranger, it’s been a long time.” I figured this to be more spam in my inbox. My finger hung over the delete button on my keyboard when I saw the senders email address. It read “karenwatson@knowthetruth.org.” I didn’t believe my eyes. Karen, my first love, had reached out to me. I opened the email and began to read.

“Hi Rob,

It’s been forever, I know, but I had to reach out to you. I’ve always felt bad about the way things ended between us and want to make it up to you. Now I finally can. As no doubt you’ve seen by my email address I’ve kept the passion alive with my website <http://www.Knowthetruth.org>. I’ve made what we did as teenagers my life’s work. I wanted to know if you’d like to meet and discuss it further.

Karen”

I reread the email again and sat dumbfounded. With so many questions running through my mind, the world of numbers went out the window. I asked for date and time to meet in my response. The rest of my day faded into remembering the past.

The following Saturday I met Karen at the place of her choosing. I figured she would pick some restaurant or club, but instead she chose to meet at 11AM in the neighborhood library. Dressing down in jeans and a casual

shirt, I felt a little weird walking into the reference section of the library. I looked for her but only saw a couple of teenage kids doing homework at one of the tables.

Checking at my watch, I noted the time, 11:15AM. It wasn’t like Karen to be late but that had been the girl I knew then. I began to regret my decision to come when a hand grabbed my shoulder. Turning around, I looked right into the eyes of Karen.

She’s as pretty as I remembered, but I noted she seemed under some distress. She wore faded blue jeans and a T shirt. Her dark hair looked matted and flat. She placed her finger over her lips to signal my silence as she led me to a small alcove adjacent to the reference section. There, we sat down and talked.

My heart pounded inside my chest. My excitement at seeing her overruled any doubts that lingered on the surface. She smiled at me, that quiet unassuming smirk that always lent me to dreams far and above any friendship we shared.

“I’m glad you could come.”

“I wouldn’t have missed it for the world.”

My emotions got the better of me. I thought about how silly I must look. Nervously fidgeting like a dopey teenager. I struggled to control of myself as Karen got right to business.

“I’m sure you’ve got plenty of questions about why I reached out to you.”

“Yes-,”

She cut me off before I could say another word. She stayed rigid, even distant. I noticed too that she kept looking around as if she expected to see someone watching us.

“Remember the day we last saw each other?”

I nodded.

“My life changed after that. I know we were close back then, but I always kept things about me, about my family, from you. I didn’t realize the significance of them until later. It had to do with my father’s work.”

She drew a business card from her pocket and handed it to me. It had the same logo we

saw on that igloo cooler that day. The bottom of the card had her father's name along with some GPS coordinates.

"Mark Watson" The name fell out of my mouth. "Your father is involved in this?"

"It was all a lie. His job, the excuses of why he had to uproot and move the family so often, everything he ever told us. It was only through connections I made via my efforts that I found out about his real vocation. He worked for the federal government. But that's not the worst of it. The project he worked on back then, well, I don't know how to tell you but, ---"

Her body twitched nervously as her eyes darted around the library. She saw a man wearing a dark suit walking by the reference section. Her head ducked down below the border of the alcove where we sat. She leaned in close to me speaking in a hoarse whisper.

"I've been getting closer to the truth. But they, he knows about me Rob. My phone line's been tapped, my emails are being traced, and I'm sure I'm being followed."

My face dropped in pure shock from what she'd said.

Karen saw my reaction and got herself under control before she continued. "His work involved genetics. Human genetics, Rob I think they were, ---"

The man in the suit passed by our alcove; He didn't say anything, but the color in Karen's face drained away as he glanced over at us. He continued on toward the exit of the library. Karen looked as if she would faint. She reached over and grabbed both of my hands tightly with hers. Her eyes blazed with something yet untold as the sweat began to form on her face.

"Rob you have to believe me. There have been experiments, manipulations of human DNA; it's still going on today. We have to try and stop it before it's too late."

I didn't know what to say. My mind became a jumble of thoughts and emotions, as wondered how the girl I used to know became the person sitting in front of me now. I said the only thing that came to mind.

"What do you want me to do?"

"Help me expose them Rob."

Every bone in my body said no, but I didn't want her to go. She had sparked my curiosity.

"I'll try, but you have to explain what is going on."

Her body relaxed and she smiled at me once more.

"Thanks, I knew I could count on you. I'll reach out soon."

She got up from the alcove and made her way stealthily from the library. I remained sitting there for a while thinking about just what I had gotten myself into.

Two weeks went by before I heard from her again. This time contact came in the form of an unpostmarked letter I found in the mailbox of my apartment. I recognized her handwriting on the envelope and opened it. A short note detailed where and when we would meet.

She had chosen an open café in the middle of the city. I knew the place and got a table outside as I waited on her. I kept the business card she'd given me cupped in one hand. Drinking coffee, I scanned the crowd, I saw her coming toward me. She looked a far cry from the person I'd seen at the library.

She wore a flowing spring dress. Her raven hair styled with long and graceful waves. She wore little make up. Just enough to accent her already alluring features. Flat shoes adorned her feet as she strode toward me. My heart sang. I'd never seen this side of her before. And that put me on edge. My heart imagined the possibilities while my rational mind reminded me of the scene from the library. My smile remained, but I became more cautious as she stood over me.

"I'm glad you're here." I said in a low voice. "I hope you can explain the revelations you laid on me back at the library."

Her confidence beamed as she looked at me.

"I told you I would."

She looked to the table as I stood and pulled out a chair for her. She took the seat as I sat down across from her and waited.

"I must apologize about the library, I'm sure I sounded crazy."

Her eyes never once left me. I became the one who looked around for anyone who might be paying attention to us.

"It's okay, but what you said about your father's work. You made it sound like something out of the X Files."

She laughed as the waiter came over to our table. We ordered two coffees. The waiter took my half-finished cup with him. She waited until after he left to continue.

"My father did work for the government and on some pretty top secret stuff. Unfortunately for me." She paused and placed her hand over mine. "I mean us; it kept the family moving around a lot. I put a hold on anything I might feel for anyone because I knew eventually I would have to leave them. Now that we're older, ---"

She let the words linger there in front of me.

"You've done well for yourself Rob; you're a CPA with a reputable accounting firm. I'm sure you're proud."

"How did you know that? We never got a chance to talk about that kind of stuff at the library."

"Oh Rob," She leaned in close to me. I could smell her perfume and feel the fervor coming from her eyes. "I did some checking up on you on Classmates.com. You post there often, keeping in touch with the crowd we hung out with."

Her lie put me on guard. I didn't post on Classmates.com or any other school webpage. I'd left my high school years behind long ago. Karen remained the only link I had from those days. Something felt very wrong with this situation. How could she have gotten this information about me? My mind raced with all the old conspiracy notions of young adulthood as she reminisced further.

"I remember us back then. You didn't think I noticed, but I did."

Her smile warmed me like the sun coming from out behind the clouds.

"I felt bad about turning down when you asked me to the prom."

She then laughed as if to lessen the burden of that memory.

"You always looked at me with those puppy dog eyes, wanting more. And me, with my family always on the move, we were forever trapped in the friend zone. But I want you to know I did have feelings for you too back then."

She squeezed my hand.

"And now, just come with me and we can be together."

I didn't know what to do.

"Karen," I began.

"I know, I know, this is all so sudden. We've been apart ten years without a word and now we're here and it's now. But for me, this is something I've thought about since we were teenagers. Seeing you again, Rob, brings all of it back. All I can say is give it and us a chance. I know we can make each other happy."

It's as if my dreams of boyhood had come true. Everything I ever wanted sat right across from me. Every fantasy fulfilled, and that's when I understood. This couldn't be the Karen I knew. Someone else sat here telling me my inner most dreams. My mind pulled ahead of my heart.

"Karen, I can never express what this moment means to me. But really, I don't know anything about you. Except the group you founded and this," I opened my free hand and showed her the business card she'd given me.

The mood changed instantly. Her smile faded. She withdrew her hand from mine and stood up from the table. Her body stiffened, and her demeanor turned hostile.

"I came here wanting to revisit on something I thought was valuable to both of us. But I can see I've wasted my time. You're living in the past, still invested in that nonsense."

She delivered her epitaph before storming off and slamming the door on any future I thought we could have had.

As I watched her disappear into the crowd, I didn't feel rejection, I felt vindicated. There's a lot more to this and I'm going to find out what.

I took a leave of absence from work. The firm didn't appreciate the short notice but I needed time to myself. I began my investigation with Karen's website. At first glance, the site mostly consisted of interviews with radical scientists about UFO's, articles about Bigfoot, and The Jersey Devil along with several other myths and legends.

A side bar had a column with an ongoing blog about government conspiracies. The entries went back decades. Hundreds concerning human genetic manipulation, the mixing of certain DNA patterns of animals with humans, and even several suggested the use of extra-terrestrial DNA as well. Several entries had documentation on human cloning and several other theories. All of which had been documented by Karen herself.

Clicking on the journal, I began to read. The detail and persuasiveness of the writing, along with "supporting evidence", like photos, and declassified government reports sounded convincing. But I remained skeptical, even after what I had already experienced, I wanted something more. I scrolled toward the last entry she'd made.

It concerned her father's work. His group had been designated in charge of a project called "Project Apocalypse". Karen had obtained declassified accounts along with images of experiments in various stages of completion.

My mind became overwhelmed with all I read. Could this actually be real? And what of Karen, I thought about our last encounter. The spring dress, her seductive nature, that couldn't have been her. There must be some answer. The date posted had been over three weeks prior.

"It all fits now. Because of global warming, pollution factors, and depletion of

natural resources over the last century, the earth, as they see it, will come to an end. The government projects the planet becoming uninhabitable within the next hundred years. They had taken action with the creation of "Project Apocalypse."

Project Apocalypse, a program designed to mix human DNA with animal and/or alien cells to create the ultimate human. One who could live in any environment, in any world! Their experiments had progressed over the decades and were very close to creating a new kind of human. I collected all I could and even some evidence the government didn't know about. Some of which I have posted here. But I have other evidence too damning to entrust revealing it through amenity. I've decided to find someone I know I can trust and can help me legibly warn the public with what I've learned.

But they are on to me. I've become a threat them and their work. I'm being followed everywhere and I'm running out of time. I hope I can succeed before they stop me."

I sat, chilled to the bone. It all made sense, my doubts gone, and Karen, I'm sure now was trapped in the middle of this, that word, conspiracy, hardly seemed adequate. I had to find her, help her.

Pounding began on the front door of my apartment. As I turned, the door burst open and three men in suits entered. One of which I recognized from the library. They came in smashing everything in sight. Before I could resist, they had me pinned down on the floor.

Someone else entered the room after the men. Looking up, I saw Karen, the one from the café. Her face filled with hate, stared down at me. The last thing I remembered was an electrical shock that permeated my body. Then the image swam consumed by darkness.

I awoke in a dim room. A single window above me had dirty glass from which dingy light filled the room. I sat up on the bed that I'd been lying on. Four brick walls surrounded me. The cot on the other side of

the room had someone lying in it. To my utter surprise, the Karen from the library opened her eyes and stared back at me.

“Is it really you Rob?”

We embraced like we never had. Her words came between sobs in my ear as we held each other.

“I’m sorry Rob; this is all my fault. I never should have reached out to you.”

Then the cell door opened and four people entered.

An older man with grey hair entered first. He had a distinctive walk. I recognized him as Karen’s father, Mark Watson. Then two men in dark suits followed. The Karen I’d met at the café entered, but stood just inside the door, waiting.

“I see you two have renewed acquaintances,” Mark said with a smile.

Karen and I faced the four who stood blocking the doorway.

“I can’t believe you would do it.” I blurted. “Your own daughter.”

The two Karen’s eyes met. The one from the library looked horrified while her counterpart stared back smugly.

Mr. Watson noted their exchange and turned toward me.

“Sacrifices have been made in the past to ensure the project’s progress to this point. Many such as you have been brought here for experimentation. Just look what we have done.” He looked to Karen from the library. “I would have thought you, above all people, would approve Robert. I was aware of the feelings you had for my daughter. Karen here,”

He referenced the one from the café as she replied. “And he still does. The scope of what we are doing here is well beyond anything either of you could comprehend.” The café Karen stated. “In the decades since the project began, we’ve pushed human evolution centuries ahead. You’ve seen only a glimpse of what we have achieved.”

“Yes,” Mark continued. “The Karen you see here is far superior to the original. She can adapt to any environment, any atmosphere,

even the vacuum of space has no effect on her bodily functions.”

“I am a composite of human, animal, and extra-terrestrial DNA.” The café Karen glared at me with a sense of superiority.

“I always knew you were up to no good, Dad, but I had no idea.” The library Karen glowered at her father.

“True, you didn’t” he shot back. “It was amusing when you were younger. You and Robert here, peering into the mysteries, trying to understand. And when you shunned the traditional career I’d set up for you, and went rogue, continuing your quest,” Mark showed his daughter a conniving smile. “To know the truth, you had no idea of what was going on right under your nose.”

“I’ll nominate you for Father of the year.” Karen from the library declared.

“Shouldn’t we be going, Mr. Watson?” The café Karen interrupted.

“Yes, too bad neither of you will have time to reminisce, because I’ve scheduled the next phase of our current experiment. You’ve already met the clone of Karen we created, Robert. Judging by your initial reaction, you were quite taken with her.”

“You were watching, I imagine.”

“We’re always watching, Robert. She is only another step in what we hope to accomplish. That meeting at the café was set up to convince you to accompany Karen here, of your own free will.”

“But your business card Karen gave me threw a monkey wrench in that plan.”

Robert scowled at the café Karen. “I knew it seemed too good to be true.”

“Very intuitive on your part Robert, but we had to keep up appearances. We didn’t want you to catch on too quickly so...”

“I acted appropriately-.” The café Karen stated bluntly.

“Since you refused to go with her, we had to use other means of persuasion to get you here. Come; let’s not waste any more time. Guards, bring them.”

The café Karen led the way followed by Mark Watson. Karen and I remained in the

rear escorted by the two men in suits as we all stepped out into the hallway. We walked down the corridor away from the cell.

My mind raced trying to find any way out. I noted the Taser hanging on the belt of one of the guards. As we rounded a bend in the hall, I gambled.

Grabbing the Taser from his belt, I activated it and jammed it into his midsection. He collapsed amidst a loud yelp as he hit the floor, motionless. The library Karen elbowed the other guard in the ribs and grabbed his Taser. She immobilized him with one quick strike to the chest. We quickly ran down the hall in the opposite direction.

The café Karen and Mark Watson spun at the commotion behind them. The café Karen made an attempt to pursue, but Mark stopped her.

“Never mind, track them using the cameras.”

We ran wild, but our luck held as we came to a stairwell at the end of the corridor. It had no lock, so we entered and ran upstairs to the next landing. Every other landing had a floor level marked on it. It didn't take us long to climb five floors upward before stopping to try and catch our breath.

“We have to keep moving.” Karen said between breaths.

“We don't even know where we're going.” I huffed.

“Government installations like this are built like a catacomb. We were held underground. If we keep climbing, we'll come to a main level. Then maybe, we can get out before we're caught.”

“How do you know so much about government buildings?”

Karen gasped for air trying not to laugh as she began to climb the stairs.

“It's what I do, Rob. Jeez, you're such a dork.”

I smiled and followed her.

The floor numbers became smaller until we came to “Level 1”. Karen stopped just outside the door and glanced out the door's one window.

“It looks clear.”

“Don't you think they'll be looking for us?” I asked.

“This isn't my first time inside a restricted site. If we can time things right, we should be able...”

She pulled back from the window and signaled to me to press up against the opposite wall like she had. The window darkened with what must have been a face looking in. After what seemed like an eternity, it had gone.

“Okay, let's go.” Karen opened the door.

I followed her into the corridor. We reached a fork in the hall and I noticed a sign. It pointed toward the front entrance of the building.

“Karen look!”

The bold print read, “MAIN ENTRANCE” with an arrow pointing to the left. Below that read, “LOADING DOCK & DELIVERIES” had an arrow pointing to the right.

She read the sign and moved right.

“Do you think we can walk right out the front door without being stopped?” she began-, “We need to find the loading dock area. That's our best bet.”

We hadn't seen a soul since the man who looked into the stairwell. Up ahead were a set of double doors with a sign above, “GENETICS LAB SOUTH WING.” Looking inside the window, the entire lab looked dark and deserted.

Karen opened the door.

“What are you doing?” I whispered looking back over my shoulder.

“All the data I've obtained says this lab is the heart of the Apocalypse Project. This is our only chance to finish this.”

She slipped inside before I could say another word. Reluctantly, I followed her in.

“What do you intend to do?” I wondered.

“Complete the project. It's why I brought you here.” She said.

Suddenly the lights clicked on. Mark Watson's voice boomed coming from loud speakers stationed at various points around

What's Happening in September

North American Literary

Festivals & Conferences

September 21 – 24, 2017 South Dakota Festival of Books
Deadwood and Rapid City, SD
<http://www.sdbookfestival.com/>

September 21 – 24, 2017 The American Christian Fiction Writers (ACFW) Annual Conference
Grapevine, TX
<http://www.acfw.com/conference>

September 22 – 24, 2017 Baltimore Book Festival
Baltimore, MD
<http://www.BaltimoreBookFestival.com>

September 22 – 24, 2017 Southern California Writers' Conference, A Weekend for Words
Irvine, CA
<http://www.writersconference.com/la>

September 23, 2017 Florida Heritage Book Festival and Writers' Conference
St. Augustine, FL
<http://www.fhbookfest.com>

September 24, 2017 Word on the Street
Toronto, Ontario, Canada
<http://thewordonthestreet.ca/toronto/>

September 28 – October 1, 2017 Moonlight and Magnolias Romance Writers' Conference
Peachtree Corners, GA
<http://www.georgiaromancewriters.org/mm-conference/>

September 28 – 30, 2017 The Power of Story - Central Coast Writer's Conference
San Luis Obispo, CA
<http://www.CentralCoastWritersConference.com>

the lab. A row of monitors hung suspended from the ceiling. They presented a prerecorded video showing our entire progression from the cell to the lab.

“You see Robert; we needed very particular DNA for the next phase of the project. Karen suggested that we use you. Your meeting at the library was staged to see if she could entice you into helping her. Obtaining a sample of your DNA came quite easily from our waiter from the café. Its subsequent testing confirmed Karen’s proposal.”

Karen simply stood smiling at me.

“It’s what I’ve wanted for so long Rob. Now we can be together, forever.”

The doors to the lab flew open as various technicians in white lab coats filed in followed by a horde of men in dressed in suits carrying weapons.

Mark Watson entered the lab last as the doors closed behind him. He adjusted his white lab coat and looked at Karen and me. His eyes filled with hope and promise.

“Now you two, let’s get started.”



Pilcrow & Dagger



The Shorts

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