

# Wrong Number?

A short story by David Clarke

"Hello, you've two messages:

Message one: Good afternoon I do hope all goes well with you, under the knife. This is Roger Harper and I would very much like to speak to you. My number is 01753 44414. Very good luck to you.

Message two, Hello this is Jane, your gift of fear is now available, thank you."

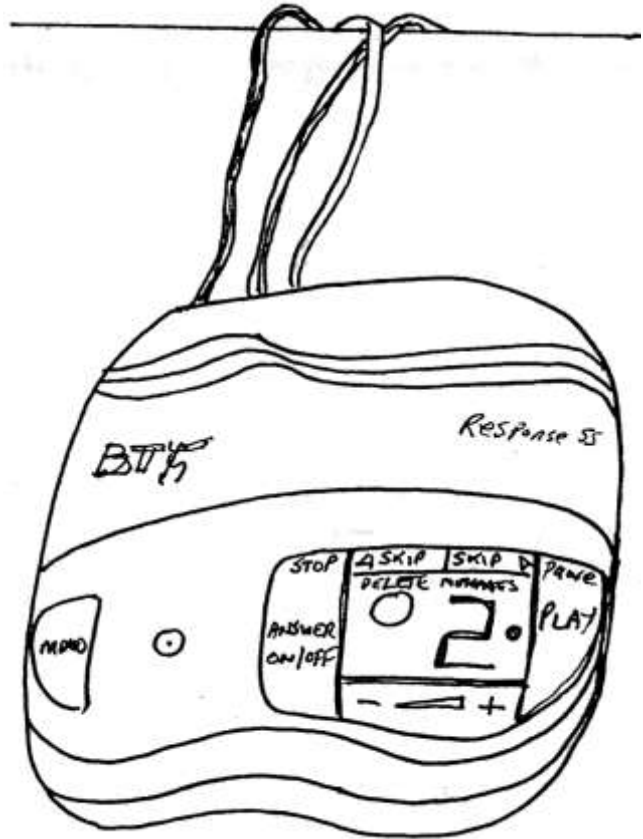
The first caller had a deep, velvety, calm voice, whilst the second voice was brisk and business like. As I retrieved the messages from 1571, I was starting to wish I had not agreed to the free three-month trial of BT Call Minder. At first it seemed as if we had received two wrong number calls.

Dismissing the first call as a wrong number, I pondered on the second. Uneasily. For a brief moment I wondered if it was connected to the first call. Then with a sudden rush of memory | recalled that three weeks earlier I had ordered a book for my wife Hilary. Yes, of course, 'Gift of Fear' by De Becker was reviewed on a repeated Oprah Winfrey show. It was at this moment I noticed a yellow post-it note under the computer mouse. Hilary's note read: Peter, the call from Roger Harper is not a wrong number, and he would like you to contact him today, mutual benefit.

Because of the reference to 'under the knife' I had dismissed the caller as a wrong number, but now the deep intonations of his voice on the message seemed to constantly repeat in my mind. Snatching the phone I quickly tapped in Harper's number. A recorded voice responded, ' The number you have dialled has not been recognised, please hang up and try again.'

My jaw dropped as I muttered to myself, 'What on earth is going on?' - no, to be fair, there's probably a simple explanation. Then I realised my mobile phone had just beeped, it was a text message from my sister: *'Last week I went to the library and found the book Shambala, which means Shangri-La. This brought back memories of Lost Horizon, one our favourite films. Cya soon, luv Brenda.'*

I was in a very reflective mood, which was not surprising really, as it was the evening of Thursday 31<sup>st</sup> December 2009. When we were young children, how we enjoyed watching repeats of Lost Horizon on the TV. I remembered the 4- inch thick glass lens, strapped onto the 14-inch black and white screen, distorting the images of the snow-covered mountains. How four people were kidnapped and taken by plane to a hidden Tibetan valley, where there was no hatred or violence and everyone lived to a great age. Two of the kidnapped men escaped from this idyllic civilisation



with a young Tibetan woman, only to find she aged rapidly, died then turned to dust as they left the safety of the beautiful love filled valley. They realised the valley really was Shangri-La, but too late. As children, by the end of the film, Brenda and I had a shed a tear or two. But now it seemed just like Hollywood moonshine.

With a sudden flicker of my memory I decided I must clear up the mystery of the first telephone message. Dialling Harper's number again with a sense of urgency, I was pleased to hear his dulcet tones on an answering machine: *'Hello, Slough 44414, please leave a message after the tone.'* Aha! There was a possible clue here, Brenda also lives near Slough. A couple of phone calls later I had solved the mystery. Brenda knew Roger Harper, and in conversation with him had mentioned a friend (who by coincidence was called Peter) who was due to have an operation - hence the reference to under the knife! It was just a case of mistaken identity. Sorted!

All the signs of my uneasiness were now drifting away and my thoughts turned to celebrating the New Year.

As midnight approached Hilary and I raised our wine filled glasses, in a toast to see in the New Year. Big Ben rang in the New Year with the first chime, together we said, 'Happy New Year!'

Hilary added, 'And let us spare a thought for all the people caught up in the horrors of war. Pray for the world and its future.'

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Your short story can be anything between 600 and 3,000 words in length, and if at all possible be submitted by e-mail, of course the subject matter is entirely up to you.

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## Inversions

Read the same upside down

