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It is far harder to kill a phantom

by Alex Harrison

I sat in my prison cell waiting to find out who my new room mate would be. A thief? A murderer? Perhaps they were an Activist. Or perhaps, like me, they were innocent of the crime they had been charged with. Would they believe me when I told them I was innocent, even though I had been found guilty?

It all started about a year ago. I was teaching at a local comprehensive school. It was my first year and I was loving it. My fellow colleagues were supportive and the kids were a really great bunch. Keen to learn. Hungry for knowledge. High on life.

High on life. Well so I thought. Then, one day in my class I thought one of the students looked a little distracted. Her pupils were very dilated. I could see that she was not concentrating. I waited to the end of the lesson and asked her to stay behind.

I questioned if she had taken anything. She denied it. I couldn't be sure so just gave her a verbal warning.

Over the next three weeks I noticed a deterioration in her work. I knew something was up but could not get to the bottom of it. Stupidly I offered her extra tutorials. She was a very bright student and I did not want her to fall behind.

We would meet after school. Something was clearly troubling her. Gradually she began to talk. To open up. Her homelife was pretty terrible. Her stepfather was violent. Her mother terrified. They both took drugs and often left them lying around. She had started to use them to escape from the hell that was home. And then, suddenly she cried. She cried and cried. She threw herself into my arms and cried.

What happened next was all far too surreal. Police, lights, shouting. Before I knew it I was being arrested. Her stepfather appeared from nowhere and was yelling “its him, its him. He’s been supplying my daughter.”

The police took my bags and started to go through them. Inside they found a small stash of cocaine. I had never seen it before. It didn’t matter what I said, it was far harder to kill a phantom than a reality. I knew he must have put them there but would never be able to prove it. I had only met him once and he had clearly taken a dislike to me.

The headlines were terrible “Teacher seduces student and feeds her drugs”. The lies. The shame and the worst thing I was innocent. She was too scared to say anything. The jury found me guilty. Nothing I did or said would convince them I was innocent. The only thing I was guilty of was being a naive fool to think I could help.