

THE WEIGHT OF SECRETS

Steve Meredith

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[Steve.Meredith@live.com](mailto:Steve.Meredith@live.com)

INT. BAR - EARLY MORNING

The only light on inside the bar is over a back corner table, where former Adams County Sheriff HENRY WEST sits, drinking bourbon and smoking a cigarette.

A moment later, the door in the opposite corner of the room opens, and newly-elected Adams County Sheriff SAM NELSON, Henry's replacement, walks in. Sam and Henry are the only two people in the bar.

SAM:  
They always let you close this place down?

HENRY:  
Being county sheriff for 45 years has its perks. You'll come to learn that in time.

Sam walks over to the booth and sits across from Henry. Henry pours Sam a glass of bourbon.

SAM:  
I shouldn't drink on my first day on the job.

HENRY:  
Have some bacon and eggs before you go into work. It'll sober you up.

Sam lets out a brief laugh. Raises the glass and drinks.

SAM:  
How's the first day of retirement?

HENRY:  
Not as relaxing as I'd hoped.

SAM:  
Why's that?

HENRY:  
Everyone thinks about retirement as something that's years down the road. Then it gets here and it's like...well, what now?

SAM:  
Well, you've got time on your hands to figure that out.

HENRY:

Well, that's the reason I called  
you here Sam.

(A beat)

I actually don't know how much time  
I have left.

(A beat)

I have stage four lung cancer.

Sam lets his shoulders sag.

SAM:

Jesus, Henry, I'm sorry. How long  
have you known?

HENRY:

Ever since I announced my  
retirement.

SAM:

You aren't doing chemo?

HENRY:

There'd be no point, Sam.

SAM:

How long do you have left?

HENRY:

Doctor says six months, if I'm  
lucky, which I have been, for the  
most part.

SAM:

Is there anything that I can do for  
you?

HENRY:

No, not really. I just need you to  
take the advice that I give you  
seriously.

SAM:

And what advice would that be?

Henry sighs deeply. Takes a drag on his cigarette. What  
he's about to tell Sam has been weighing on him for a while.

HENRY:

Sam, did I ever tell you how my  
wife died?

SAM:

Yeah. When I announced my campaign for Sheriff. You told me she was murdered, and that the investigation was still open.

HENRY:

It is. But the truth of the matter is that I knew who did it immediately.

SAM:

(taken aback)

Who?

HENRY:

A man by the name of John Worthington.

SAM:

(you're shitting me)

John Worthington?!

HENRY:

Yeah. Ben Worthington's son.

SAM:

The U.S. Attorney General? His son? And you have proof of this?

HENRY:

I can put John at my house between the hours of 9pm and 11pm on the night of my wife's murder.

SAM:

That's all? What about motive? Physical evidence?

HENRY:

(waving him off)

He had no reason to be there, Sam. And he knew that charges would never be filed against him. Not when his dad was, at the time, the county's District Attorney. And certainly not when his dad had friends in the Governor's Mansion.

SAM:

Are you asking me to look into Worthington? If you're right, do

(MORE)

SAM: (CONT'D)

you have any idea what this means?  
For both John and his father?

HENRY:

John Worthington's already dead.

SAM:

(confused)  
Are you speaking figuratively?

HENRY:

No. I killed him, Sam.

Sam's eyes go wide.

HENRY: (CONT'D)

And if you decide to arrest me,  
I'll sign a confession, and I'll  
pay the price.

Sam is stunned and speechless.

SAM:

You're telling me that Ben  
Worthington's son is dead by your  
hand, and you've been able to keep  
this secret for 23 years?

(A beat)

How did you do it?

HENRY:

When I was a kid, my dad was a real  
grease monkey. Worked on cars for  
a living. He and I spent years  
underneath the hood of both classic  
and contemporary cars. I learned a  
lot from him, including where the  
brake lines on a car were located.

EXT. BAR - NIGHT (1993)

Henry, dressed in street clothes, hides from view as he  
makes his way through the parking lot and finds John  
Worthington's car. He slides under the car and goes to  
work, cutting the car's brake lines.

SAM: (V.O.)

You made it look like a car  
accident.

HENRY: (V.O.)

In the end, that's what it was.

(MORE)

HENRY: (V.O.) (CONT'D)

The kid liked to drink more than his dad did.

EXT. RIVER BANK - LATER THAT NIGHT (1993)

Several police and rescue vehicles line a bridge overhead, as well as each side of the river bank, looking at a totaled vehicle, partially submerged in the river. Among the emergency personnel, Henry stands, now in his police uniform.

HENRY: (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Decided to drive drunk that night. Crossed over the center line on the bridge entering the county, swerved, hit the guardrail, dove straight into the river. Car was totaled. Afterward, Ben used his money and influence to get a scholarship set up in John's name. Got the bridge named after him too.

INT. BAR - EARLY MORNING (PRESENT DAY)

Same as before. Sam lets all of this information sink in for a minute.

HENRY: (CONT'D)

When the Governor decided to run for President, he decided to offer Ben a cabinet position.

SAM:

(un-fucking believable)

So the President offered him the U.S. Attorney General's office.

(A beat)

What exactly do you want me to do with this information? I mean, Jesus, you just told me you murdered somebody, and thought it through long enough to make it look like an accident.

HENRY:

It's up to you. Like I said, I'll come with you, sign a confession--

SAM:

Oh for God's sake Henry! You and I both know what would happen if I arrested you. In a town this size,

(MORE)

SAM: (CONT'D)

you think I'm gonna arrest a man destined to have his name plastered to the County Courthouse? Nevermind the fact that you'll likely die waiting for a trial, and that your cancer diagnosis would surely come out. Christ, it would be political suicide!

(A beat. Sam's angry now)

You should know however, that I see right through you, and I'm not going to carry this secret with me. You and I both know that the county DA will never prosecute you unless you come forward and confess. I'll give you until six o'clock tonight to do just that.

HENRY:

What happens after six?

SAM:

Henry, you've made a dangerous and poor assumption about me. You must think that I'm so young and ambitious as to put aside my morals so that I can get ahead in this world, and that's where you're wrong. After six o'clock tonight, I am coming to your house and arresting you. If you aren't there, you'll be a fugitive of the law.

Sam gets up from the booth and heads for the door.

HENRY:

(defeated, knew it might come to this)

You're going to make a great sheriff, Sam. Because you just learned the most important lesson that I can teach you.

SAM:

(turning back toward Henry)

What's that?

HENRY:

The weight of a man's secrets can

(MORE)

HENRY: (CONT'D)

kill him, so it's best to keep your secrets small and meaningless.

SAM:

You think that your secrets are killing you?

Henry holds up his burning cigarette in one hand, and his glass of bourbon in the other.

HENRY:

I didn't start any of this stuff until 1993. Now, I can't seem to cope without it. So yes, my secret has killed me. For the past 23 years.

Sam nods, turns, and exits the bar into the early morning dawn.

INT. COUNTY POLICE HEADQUARTERS - EVENING

The clock on the wall reads 5:30 pm. Henry walks in and approaches LILY GREENE, the receptionist. He looks exhausted and out of it.

LILY:

Well hey there sheriff. One day into retirement and you're already back. Couldn't stay away?

HENRY:

Lily, I'd like to turn myself in.

LILY:

(did I hear that right?)  
What did you say?

HENRY:

I'd like to turn myself in, for the murder of John Worthington.

LILY:

(holy shit)  
Oh, um...okay sheriff--

HENRY:

Lily, you don't have to call me Sheriff anymore, just treat it like anyone else. Get a detective and have him get a room ready.



LILY:

Okay, I'll be right back. Have a seat.

(A beat)

Are you feeling okay? Do you know where you are?

HENRY:

Yes, Lily, I know where I am. Please just hurry. I don't have a lot of time left, and I can't do this anymore.

Henry takes a seat in the lobby as Lily goes and gets a detective.

Moments later, Lily appears with a detective, who escorts Henry back to an interrogation room.

FADE TO BLACK.

ROLL CREDITS.

THE END.