

The Power of the Rose

The sequel to
The Haunting of Hawthorne

by
Anne Schraff

HAWKER BROWNLOW

E D U C A T I O N

1 IT MUST HAVE been midnight when the phone rang. I'd only been in bed for about ten minutes. Before that I was on the phone with my friend Dina. We couldn't stop talking about starting university in the new semester.

'Oh, my God!' I heard her cry, and I sat straight up in bed. A wave of cold terror washed over me.

I scrambled from bed, not waiting to hear more. I half ran, half stumbled down the hall to my parents' bedroom. 'Mum, what is it? What's the matter?' I yelled.

'Your father—' she said to me. My terror grew. I knew he was out there every night driving a cab, and it worried me sick. When he used to be a truck driver, he worked days. But times were hard, especially around here. So he had to take whatever work was available.

'Someone smashed his window with

a big rock', Mum said. 'Over in Highland Road, almost right at the Owens' driveway'. Mrs Owens was my mother's good friend. And her daughter Janessa and I had recently begun hanging out together.

I felt my legs slamming like a jackhammer. 'He's okay, isn't he?' I asked, trying to keep the fear out of my voice.

'Yes', Mum said. 'He was cut by flying glass and he bumped his head. But Mrs Owens said he was conscious. She spoke to him briefly before phoning me. She doesn't think he's hurt too badly. And the paramedics had arrived and were looking him over'.

My brain was spinning. What I'd always feared would happen had finally happened. Some crook had hit Dad's cab. Just the other day Janessa had told me about a lot of ugly things that were happening in her neighbourhood. Such as Jim Argus and Dennie Plover stealing from parked cars. Jim and Dennie were troublemakers who almost ruined our senior year at Hawthorne High.

My mother dressed quickly, and I

threw on a pair of jeans and a T-shirt. Dad was okay, I kept telling myself. Just a bump on his head and a few cuts. In a couple of minutes we'd be in the emergency room and he'd be cracking jokes and cheering us up.

As I turned to switch off my bedroom light, my eyes fell on my most treasured memento. It didn't seem like much—just a pink rose petal in a covered glass dish. But it had been given to me by the boy who'd loved me in my final year. And every time I felt sad or scared, I'd look at it and feel better. I never talked about the rose petal to anybody—not even Dina or Janessa. I never talked to them about Basil Harris, either. He'd come to Hawthorne High and brought spirit back to the student body and made our senior year special. He'd left me the pink rose and then vanished. Not long after, the rose had also disappeared. Luckily, though, I still had a small part of the flower as a reminder of Basil and the love I still felt for him.

I touched the glass dish and stared at the rose petal. Then I lifted the cover

and took a deep breath. The perfume of the rose was as fresh and intense as when Basil gave it to me. I replaced the lid and turned my thoughts back to my father.

When I was seated in the car with my mother, she asked, 'You okay, Valerie?'

'Yeah', I said. I have had epilepsy since I was seven years old. I always take my medication, so I never have seizures. But sometimes Mum still worries about me. Dad never does. Dad thinks I can climb mountains, and I love him for that.

'Why would anybody attack Dad like that?' I asked as we drove toward the hospital.

A look of weary bitterness touched Mum's face. 'It seems as if things are falling apart everywhere. People getting laid off. Lots of hoods hanging around too. I suppose smashing up a cab seems like the thing to do'.

'Mum! There's Dennie Plover!' I cried as we turned a corner. All the ugly memories from school rushed through my mind. How Dennie and Jim Argus tried

to mess up the school as Basil was trying to make it better. As we drove by, Dennie yelled something insulting at me.

‘I’m glad you’ll be going to university in Melbourne’, Mum said. ‘Thank God you got that scholarship. You’ll be out of all this’.

Yeah, I thought to myself, and you and Dad are stuck here! All of a sudden my upcoming journey to that nice university in Melbourne felt like a betrayal.

‘Hey’, Dad called out to us when we finally entered the emergency room. ‘I don’t feel as bad as I look, so take it easy’. He was lying on a bed, his head bandaged, abrasions on his face.

‘We were so worried’, Mum said. ‘Lily Owens phoned and told us what happened. But she didn’t see who did it’.

‘I’m afraid I can’t help there either. I didn’t see the thing coming. I was going to pick up a fare at the Blackburn Inn—some guy too drunk to drive. All of a sudden my side window comes crashing in and I got a piece of footpath in my lap. But I’ll be okay. I’ll be fine. It’s part of being a cabbie in this city, I suppose.

Goes with the territory’.

I hugged my father, trying not to let the tears overflow. He was such a good man. He’d done everything right. Finished high school, worked his heart out on the job, put his family first. Now here he was, fifty four and driving a cab on these mean streets. It just didn’t seem fair.

Dad ended up staying in the hospital for two days. He had a mild concussion, and the doctors wanted to keep him for observation. Dad kept joking and saying the nurses were keeping him longer than they had to because he was such a hunk. But when he thought we weren’t looking, I saw his hands tremble. I could see the attack had damaged more than his head. He was scared to death. How could he go back to driving a cab?

I couldn’t get my dad off my mind. I was still depressed when I went to work on Sunday. I worked part-time at a bakery to earn money for university expenses not covered by the scholarship.

‘Hey, Valerie, indulge me. One iced doughnut with a deadly dose of choco-