

## **Smiling Faces Sometimes Lie**

### Character Sketch:

Sarah Thomas, a young, single, observant, working-class female resides in Charleston, South Carolina. She leads a fairly simple life; however, she is extremely curious and inquisitive of her surroundings. Best in Shoe, the small shoe store Sarah owns, is the main retailer of shoes in the town. With her earnings from the store, Sarah lives a fairly privileged life, especially because the money is shared between her and her golden retriever, Sandy. A small blue, Charleston style house with a large well-landscaped yard and located in a modest, extremely safe neighborhood is what she calls home. Physically, Sarah is short, blonde and average looking. Her large blue eyes are always scanning her surroundings from behind a thick pair of glasses. She is somewhat reclusive and prefers to be alone; therefore, she has resorted to being single until a change of heart.

### Prologue:

Sarah Thomas nervously fidgeted in the small office chair while others around her mindlessly flipped through magazines and filled out paperwork. Above her read a sign “Investigation Department of Charleston, South Carolina.” Her observant eyes scanned the crowd for possible candidates that might be competition in the hiring position for a detective job at the office. No one appeared nervous or dressed in attire appropriate for an interview, so Sarah promptly assumed she was safe.

Although she lacked experience in the field of crime scene investigation, Sarah had a strong passion for the field. She replayed the interview scenario in her head, with her answers to

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possible questions planned out and edited to perfection. Before she could finish, the secretary entered the waiting room.

“Sarah Thomas?” she requested.

“Yes, that is me!” Sarah replied. She rose from her seat, brushed the invisible wrinkles from her black pencil skirt, and approached the employee waiting in the doorway.

“Follow me please.”

The two walked through a series of cubicles and hallways until they approached a large office. The door had a large sign that read “Human Resources”, and inside a middle-aged man sat scribbling away on a stack of papers on his desk. The secretary showed Sarah to the room before quickly rushing away to another task. The man’s eyes rose from his work and scanned Sarah up and down as she took a seat in the plush office chair directly across from his desk. The room reeked of strong coffee, and papers in organized stacks flooded the room.

“Thank you for coming in today, Ms. uhh,” the man scanned the paper in front of his face, “Thomas, yes Ms. Sarah Thomas.”

“My pleasure,” Sarah replied without delay.

Throughout the next thirty minutes, the interview went along as Sarah had planned. Her previously determined answers were recited perfectly, all the way up to the most nerve-wracking question of all.

“So, what type of past experience do you have in this field,” he asked, raising his eyes and eyebrows up to Sarah.

“Well Sir, I don’t exactly have experience, but I have a story to exemplify by detective-like qualities,” Sarah stated in a hopeful tone.

“Alright then, I’m all ears” the man stated as he relaxed back into his chair.

Tale:

Accompanied by my usual alarm, I was awoken on a sunny Saturday morning to the harsh sounds of eighteen wheelers outside of my window. I quickly arose from my bed and curiously approached the window, for it was not normal for such industrial equipment to be found in my quiet neighborhood. As I pulled the sheer curtain aside, I noticed four large moving vans parked on my street. The movers bustled in and out of the house neighboring my own, a house that had been vacant for almost a decade. There was a shiny minivan parked in the driveway, but no one besides the movers came from within the house. *Maybe a family has moved in, considering the car*, I thought to myself. Sandy also pranced up the window, resting her snout on the window frame to comfortably observe the odd situation.

“New neighbors?” I quietly asked Sandy; however, she obviously only replied with a soft whimper.

After determining that watching from my window wasn’t helping me gain any knowledge, except for what the furniture no inside the house looked like, I decided to continue on with my usual morning routine. On my way out the door, I stopped by the mailbox to retrieve today’s shipment. A middle- aged man sauntered towards me just as I was about to walk back inside. A creepy grimace stretched across his face, and his eyes glared right into mine.

“Well hello neighbor,” he said to me in a deep voice with an out stretched hand. “The name is Carl, Carl Harris.”

“Sarah Thomas, nice to meet you. So, what brings you to Charles---”

“Oh, no need for questions now ma’am. There will be plenty of time for us to get to know each other better, right? However, I must ask, where is the best place to buy firewood in Charleston? I’m always in need of it, and I haven’t seen a retailer anywhere since we arrived.”

“There is a family down the road that sells some. House number 5647 I believe,” I replied. *Firewood? Always in need of it? That’s extremely odd,* I thought to myself.

“Great! Thanks for the help!” Carl exclaimed, flashing a toothy smile and slightly winking at me as he turned on his heels towards his house. While sauntering back to his house, a radiant yet creepy smile lingered on his face. Concluding that my new neighbor was simply friendly, I continued my daily routine and left for work.

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With summer just around the corner, all the companies were sending in shipments of their latest line of footwear. Boxes flooded the stock room of my small shoe store, barely leaving any room for the new exclusive line supposedly arriving this afternoon. Scott Bryan, a break-through designer in the shoe industry, recently designed a line of fitness footwear, and my store was going to be one of the first retailers in the entire Southeast to sell the collection. Since business was slow on Saturday mornings, I had nothing else to do except sit there impatiently for the UPS truck to arrive. After mindlessly occupying myself for two hours, the delivery truck pulled up in front of my store. I jumped up from my seat and ran to the door, almost forgetting that it was glass and crashing directly into it.

One by one, the flawless all-black, sleek boxes were unloaded from the truck. When the twenty boxes, one in each size, were finally lying on the floor behind the counter, I carefully opened one of the boxes. Within the tissue paper, the most beautiful shoe I had ever seen waited to be put on display. The elaborate detailing was paired with bright, neon laces. As I turned over the shoe, I noticed Scott Bryan's signature imprinted on the bottom. Underneath in size ten font read *Leave a mark wherever you go!* The shoe amazed me, and I placed it on the new pre-prepared display in the center of the store.

Shortly after I unloaded the whole shipment and set up the display, I heard the door open from behind me. Turning around quickly, I was astonished at who my most recent customer was. Carl Harris, with that same peculiar smile dominating his face, entered the store and removed his dark sunglasses.

"Well, hello neighbor! I had no idea that this was your store! What a small world!" Carl exclaimed.

"Yeah, small world I guess," I replied awkwardly. "Can I help you?"

"Yes, actually I was looking for a new pair of running shoes. Do you have any suggestions?"

"Absolutely. This pair right here actually just came in. Amazing shoes, I must say so myself. They are part of a new line by the designer Scott Bryan. Only one hundred dollars!"

"Sounds great! I'll take them. Size eleven please."

"Would you like to try them on?"

“No, I trust your opinion,” Carl replied, widening his smile even more than could ever be imagined.

I led Carl over to the register, and within minutes, the purchase was complete, and he was gone. Surprisingly, that was the only pair of the Scott Bryan’s that I sold all day. Feeling down about the lack of business, I closed the store early and drove home. However, as I passed the Harris residence, I noticed a great amount of smoke coming from what looked like a bonfire in the backyard. *Guess he found the fire wood*, I thought to myself. As the smoke continued to rise for hours, I peeked out my bedroom window before going to bed. Carl was standing over the fire tossing objects in causing the flame to increase in size every time; however, I could not determine what the objects were. Although I was bewildered by the situation, I simply forgot about it and went to bed, quickly drifting off into a deep sleep.

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Weeks passed by, and Carl Harris didn’t get any more normal. Whenever I saw him, the same friendly smile stretched across his face. He was always extremely helpful around the neighborhood and starting volunteering in the community. He quickly gained the respect of many people in Charleston, and rumors circulated about him running for mayor in the next election. However, the routine bon fires Carl started every night intrigued me, and I was curious about what he was burning every time he tossed an object into the fire.

In addition, I was growing suspicious of why I only got the newspaper once a week now. In the past, I received one every morning. I expressed my concern to my other neighbors, and they said they had the same problem. We all simply concluded that it was a new policy of the postal service, yet I was still a little unsure of the whole situation. One night I noticed something peculiar. A line of fresh foot prints stretched from my driveway, through the garden, across the

yard, and onto the Harris property. The muddy tracks finally stopped at the door way to Carl's house. Curious, I decided that I would investigate them in the middle of the night.

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The night sky was spotted with stars, and only the pale light of the moon shed upon the area between my house and Carl's. Careful not to wake the other neighbors, I left the door to my house slightly cracked and stepped by naked foot out onto the cold concrete. I quietly tip-toed down the side walk and around the back side of my house, fearing that I might be spotted. The air was still and silent, almost like there was not a soul for miles. On the back patio, a simple table with chairs and a grill in the corner lay untouched, similar to the way they have been for months. With one step onto the wood, a loud creak came out from between the cold pieces of wood. Scared of my own mistake, I considered taking cover under the table; however, crouching behind the grill appeared as a better option. I jumped into my hiding spot fast as lightening. After a few seconds, I realized that I was hiding from a simple sound and began rise to my feet.

Suddenly, a slight sound of footsteps increased in loudness, sounding like they were approaching. They were quick and light, possibly those of someone trying to sneak around. I slammed my body against the cold concrete wall behind the grill. Not even risking giving off the sound of a single breath, I remain completely silent in fear of my intruder. Slowly and carefully, I peeked my head around the corner of the grill. Four skinny legs were leisurely moving across the wooden planks. *Sandy!* Without hesitation, I jumped to my feet. Sandy, startled, turned her head and made direct eye contact with me. After chasing her back into the house, I continued on my mission, making sure I closed the door behind me.

*Why am I doing this to myself?* I thought. *I bet it was someone using my yard as a shortcut or something!* Just as I was turning around to end the task once and for all, something

caught my attention out of the corner of my eye. Scott Bryan's signature was firmly imprinted into the ground that was previously covered by the mysterious foot prints. Now, completely intrigued, I followed the footprints all the way to their origin. They began at Carl's back door, crossed our yards, and turned around at where my wood pile previously sat. Over thirty pieces of wood that were once stacked in the corner had completely vanished. Realizing that Carl had to have a connection due to his previous questions about where to find wood, I quietly walked back to his house without delay.

Near a deep fire pit filled with ashes, a tall pile of newspapers were stacked. Reaching for the top one, I glanced at the main headline. In tall, all capital letters read "Community Friend Arrested for Murder." Below, a picture of Carl Harris, with that same bright smile, was centered within a long article. I grabbed a few more of the newspapers, all of them titled with headlines such as "A Friendly Smile Cannot Hide Murder" and others alike. Astonished, I concluded that not only was my neighbor a previous murderer, but his signature smile might be putting me in danger. I quickly grabbed fifteen more newspapers and decided that I would take them to the police station in the morning. Just as I was about to flee the scene, I turned my head to notice an open window on the top floor. Illuminated by a flashlight, Carl Harris stood peering down at me with anger in his eyes. My heart skipped a beat, and within seconds, I was sprinting back toward my front door. I slammed the door behind me, insuring that it was securely locked. Before I climbed in bed for a sleepless night, I peeked out my window to discover that Carl's house was completely dark, and the window was now shut.

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The following morning, I woke up early enough to run by the police station before work. I simply submitted the newspapers and a criminal report anonymously and returned home. When I stopped by the mailbox to collect the day's mail, I found a large white envelope with "Sarah"



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scrawled on the top first in the pile. Just as I was unfolding the letter, my other neighbor Maria was walking towards me.

“Well, hello Sarah. How are you?” Maria asked. However, I was too startled to answer. Concerned about why I looked so alarmed, Maria peered over my shoulder and began to read the disturbing letter also.

*Sarah,*

*I understand you uncovered some of the evidence from my past last night. However, I would like to warn you that nobody in this town needs to be aware of my previous actions. I am giving you a fair warning that if you tell anyone about what you saw, there will be consequences. My chances at becoming mayor will not be ruined by some nosy neighbor. Thank you for your cooperation 😊*

*Carl Harris*

“Uh, Sarah, what is this?” Maria asked.

“I don’t know, but one thing I do know is I am in serious danger considering I already told the police!” Sarah replied with a shaky voice.

“What does he mean by ‘previous actions’? He appears too nice and friendly. I never suspected him as one to do anything that he would want to hide! Well, you know what they say, smiling faces sometimes lie. That is why you always have to watch your back.”

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The next day, newsstands throughout Charleston were stocked with the latest breaking news. Articles titled “From Murder to Mayor” and “You Cannot Always Trust a Friendly Neighbor” were being purchased by all of the town’s residents. I stayed inside all day with the

doors securely locked and kept a constant watch on Carl's house. It appeared as if he was hiding to avoid the embarrassment of seeing the people who previously thought of him as a friendly neighbor. Around six o'clock, a number of moving trucks pulled up in front of the house. For the next hour, Carl and the movers transported the boxes from within the house into the trucks. I decided to take a break from watching the scene and sat down to watch TV.

After about ten minutes, the doorbell rang. Without thinking, I quickly ran to the door and opened to find an unexpected visitor. Carl Harris stood in my doorway, and this time he was not smiling. There was anger in his eyes and a frown stretched across his face. Scared half to death, I almost shut the door in his face; however, I decided that it would be better just to handle the situation.

"Carl, I can explain. I reported it before I read---"

"No. There is no need to explain Ms. Thomas," Carl interrupted. "I guess my friendliness and smile were not enough to cover for all of my lies. I can make a promise to you. I always get revenge, and I can assure you that I will. Good day, Ms. Thomas."

With a simple spin on his heels, Carl was walking away from the door step. I stood there paralyzed with astonishment. As I watched the moving trucks pull away and drive into the distance, the image of Carl's smile was stuck in my head; however, it was not substantial enough to cover the lies that were hidden behind that grin.