

MORPHEUS' 10

A
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PUBLICATION



PICTURE: EDWARD G. ROBINSON FROM TURNER CLASSIC MOVIES

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MORPHEUS WRITING CONTEST

CONTEST WINNER BIOGRAPHIES

ISHARA HENRY

Placed 3rd in Visual Arts.

I am a sophomore this year, I am a member of the Aurora staff, the computer science club, and the black student union. I never thought I would actually place in one of these kinds of contests but someone always encouraged me to do so.

BARBARA PURVIANCE

Placed 1st in Poetry

I'm a junior chemistry major, and I work here on campus in the Water Quality Lab. The poem that I submitted was inspired by my own family and the genealogy research that I do in my free time.

BRENT HOLMES

Placed 1st in Non Fiction
Placed 2nd in Fiction

Brent Holmes once had a pet fish named Goldie. He was such a good little fish that he decided to help it out a little more, and being a young man unsure of the workings of life, attempted to bring the little fish out of his bowl, "for leg-room". Unfortunately, the fish became a terrible room-mate for Brent, leaving clothing on the floor, keeping the room "occupied" for long spaces of time, and setting fire to Brent's bed on multiple occasions. One night in a fit of passion Brent did what he thought was right at the time: He flushed Goldie down the toilet. Now he's a senior in college and he wonders about the wisdom of his action: shouldn't he have at least tried to talk to the fish, make things better? To remedy this lack of communication, he became a Communication major at Heidelberg University, hoping that the next fish he got would have a better chance to stave off his fury. He also likes David Bowie. A lot.

LAURIE VAN VALKENBURGH

Placed 3rd in Poetry

Laura Van Valkenburgh is a sophomore majoring in AYA Language Arts Education and minoring in Spanish. She is the president of 'Berg Allies and a clarinetist in the Symphonic Band.

NATTY BERRY

Place 1st in Academic Literature
Placed 2nd in Non Fiction,
Placed 3rd in Fiction

My name is Natty Berry, I am a Junior English Major. I'm super excited to be included in the illustrious Morpheus publication. This has all brought me one step closer to world domination. Oh, I'll show them all. AHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA.

RAY OUELLETTE

Placed 2nd in Poetry
Placed 3rd in Academic Literature

Ray Ouellette is a senior majoring in English (Writing Emphasis) and Theatre. Ray is a member of Rho Eta Delta and Alpha Psi Omega, and other things that he's forgotten when he wrote this. Ray is both a great athlete and a true humanitarian.

LIZ KURTZMAN

Placed 1st in Fiction
Placed 1st and 2nd in Visual Arts

Liz is a senior in the illustrious English department here at Heidelberg. Besides editing the Morpheus, she also is an editor and columnist for the Kilikilik and a DJ for WHEI. She recently wrote a play that was performed onstage at Gundlach to limited acclaim. She's looking forward to graduating and going on to...more school. Darn.

MATT ECHELBERY

Placed 2nd in Academic Literature

Matt Echelberry, better known as "Mclovin" throughout campus, is an English Writing Major/Film Studies Minor from Bucyrus, Ohio. A junior this year, he is very involved on campus as Co-Editor in Chief of The Kilikilik and a member of Sigma Tau Nu fraternity. When he's not writing articles or class papers, Matt also writes short stories, poetry, and song lyrics.

FICTION



PATCHING THE CRACKS

BY: LIZ KURTZMAN

Callie wasn't very impressed by Michael's new house.

"It's not very big," she pointed out. "And it's boring."

He knelt down so they were face to face. "Well," he said with as big a smile as he could muster, "It's big enough for you and me. And I was hoping you could help me decorate."

Her face lit up. "Really?"

"Yep. We can go to the store today to buy stuff for your room. Then we'll start on the rest of the house next time you come over."

It worked like a charm. She talked enthusiastically about how she was going to decorate the whole way. Most of her descriptions featured a great deal of pink and glitter. By the time they left the store, there was hardly room to fit the curtains, pillows, wall stickers, and stuffed animals into the car. He looked at the receipt and winced. Veronica would probably say that this was bribery. She would probably be right.

Surprisingly, it only took about an hour to put the room in some order, though his shoulder ached fiercely when they finished. It still looked empty, but Callie gravely promised him that she would bring some of her things next time. To fill the rest of the evening, they went on a walk around the neighborhood.

It was a blustery day in March, on the tail end of winter, and dirty heaps of partially melted snow hid the crumbling yellow curbs. They picked their way over the glacial chunks to the street, leaving the house behind them. The street looked gray, like the house, and the sky, and the sidewalk, and the snow. There wasn't much to see in the neighborhood, so they circled the block.

Callie skipped over to the corner lot and peered through the warped fence. "What's in here?"

Michael followed slowly. "It's probably just an old parking lot, honey."

"Nu-uh. It's green."

The fence was rusty and bowed, as if the weight of the gray sky had become too much for it to support. Cracks meandered through the asphalt like lines on a highway map. He removed his hands from his pockets and linked his fingers through the fence. His voice, when he spoke, sounded as flat as the green cracked surface before them. "It's a tennis court."

"Tennis?" She repeated, nose wrinkled in confusion. "Like on the Wii?"

He smiled slightly. "Well, it's a little different in real life."

"How?"

"It's much harder." He placed a hand on her back and gently steered her to face the house. "C'mon, let's go make some hot cocoa."

This was enough to distract her. "With marshmallows?"

"Is there any other way to drink it?" He teased. She ran on ahead and he followed at a more leisurely pace, casting one last lingering glance at the corner lot.

~*~*~*~

He couldn't recall, now, when he had started to hate tennis. Was it the first time he got shin splints and had to stand in that barrel of ice until his skin burned? Or maybe the year he'd had to play varsity, when the team had won the championship, but he hardly won a game. Then there was the time he had to miss the formal dance in order to compete at Nationals.

He didn't know when it started, but he remembered the day it ended with incredibly clarity. It was the final stone that broke the scale.

~*~*~*~

The next weekend that Callie came, it was a little warmer and the sun was making a gallant effort to shine. They focused on decorating the kitchen this time, with sunflowers and cheerful greens and yellows. When she was satisfied with the result, they decided to walk again.

For some strange reason, Callie seemed to be drawn to that tennis court. She flounced back to its derelict cage and without hesitation, slipped through the open door. The door looked as if it had stood ajar for years and its hinges were no doubt as immovable as stone.

Michael was much more reluctant to step through the rusty barrier. The sight of the abandoned and decayed court troubled him more than he would have guessed. The green surface was pebbled, like the scales of some great beast, and the corpses of shriveled plants struggled to escape through the splits in the pavement. Crooked poles leaned toward each other, as foreboding as gravestones, and one bedraggled net was strung across the court like the ancient web of some great spider.

Callie had none of her father's trepidation. She spun in a circle on the court and fell to the ground dramatically. She lay there, spread-eagled, and studied the sky. After a moment, she raised her head to find her father and saw him standing at the door, immobile. "Daddy, c'mere."

Despite her order, he didn't move at first. He yearned to return to his house, to the warmth and security. Then he imagined waiting in that unfamiliar living room, his things barely filling the room and family pictures watching him from the mantle. So he forced that first foot forward and, after that, it was easier. He eased himself to the ground next to her and sat, ankles crossed and entwined arms encaging his knees. "What are you doing, Callie girl?"

She pointed at the sky. "What do you think that cloud looks like?"

He peered upward. "Cotton candy?" He hazarded.

She sat up and glared at him. "That's cheating." He laughed and her grumpy expression deepened.

"Are you excited about going to the fair?" He asked.

She cheered immediately. "Yes! I want to see the animals. A boy in my class says there'll be elephants."

"Well, I don't know if there will be elephants, but there will be lots of animals," Michael told her.

She seemed to be disappointed at the possible lack of pachyderm. She pulled at the dead weeds in front of her. "Momma says you played tennis."

His smile faded at the sudden change in subject. "I did, a long time ago."

"She says you were really good."

It was his turn to recline now, his fingers locked behind his head. "I was good, for a while."

She leaned over him, her hands planted on the court and her face blocking the periwinkle sky. "Why don't you play anymore?"

He shifted uncomfortably. "Well, hon, I got hurt real bad when I was playing and I had to stop."

She laid her head on his chest and when she spoke, he felt her words echo in his ribcage. "How? Didja get hit?"

He closed his eyes and tried not to remember, to make the words just words and not memories. "Nope. Daddy was silly and tried to play too hard, so his muscles ripped."

"Ewwww."

He laughed and it eased some of the pain of remembering, but the shame lingered. "Don't you wrinkle your nose at me, you little monster," he growled, tickling her. Her shrieks of laughter chased away the shadows that clung to the old fence.

~*~*~*~*

His sophomore year in college, and a USTA coach was attending his games with increasing frequency. He was all but assured of a spot in a tournament that would enter him into the professional tour next year. Michael's team was playing another Division One school and their number one was rumored to be one of the top in the nation, but that hardly seemed to concern anyone but Michael.

The sun was beating down on him like a hammer on brass, drawing streams of perspiration from his brow. He adjusted his headband to push his soaked hair from his face. He blinked sweat from his eyes. The tension in his shoulder was sending red-hot alarms to his brain, warning him that his body was reaching his limit. His arm felt like a rubber band stretched to the breaking point and his doctor's dire words echoed in his brain.

Rotator cuff. Surgery. Career-ending.

He should take it easy.

~*~*~*~*

He called Veronica to talk to Callie, as he often did on those nights that the house seemed especially empty. It always amazed him how many shadows there were, when there was so little furniture. The glow from the phone was barely enough to see by, but he knew the number well. Sometimes it was still hard to believe it wasn't his own anymore.

Veronica's voice was distorted though the phone and it sounded strange, even though he had heard it nearly every day for the last eight years. "I'm sorry Michael, she has to get to her gymnastics competition. This is a big night for her."

He rubbed his forehead wearily and opened the front door to sit on the stoop. "I know, I just wanted to wish her luck."

"She was hoping you could come tonight."

"I know. I had to stay late to finish editing tomorrow's page. The paper's got me working strange hours now." It sounded like a feeble excuse, but it had some truth in it. The fact that he wasn't sure he could bear to sit beside the woman who was no longer his wife, as if she still was, was simply a side note. To see her cheer as their daughter was put through the paces like some trained puppy just rankled.

"Well, try harder next time."

"I will," he said, knowing he sounded as defeated as he felt. His shoulder was aching again. "Tell her I miss her and I can't wait to take her to the fair next month."

"Good-bye, Michael."

The click of her dismissal seemed surprisingly loud in the dusk. He closed the phone and stood up. The weather was mild this evening and the sun was just setting over the horizon, bathing the gray street in oranges and pinks. He descended the stairs slowly, hands tucked into his pockets. His feet carried him towards the corner lot.

As he walked, he let his mind wander over all the thoughts that he had kept at bay. Part of him wanted him to be angry at Veronica, to fume about her shortness on the phone and blame her for his empty life. But it wasn't her fault. He was the one that ran, that always ran, without regard to the damage he might inflict. He flexed his shoulder thoughtfully. Well, he was free now, whether he liked it or not.

He leaned against the fence and regarded the old court. It wasn't so bad, he reflected. With a little time and money, it could be used again someday.

The sight of the court raised something in him, something more than just memory. It made his shoulder ache, but it made his conscience ache too. He thought of what Callie had repeated from her mother and he wondered, not for the first time, if Veronica suspected.

In the fading sunlight, he wandered over to the baseline and, moving as if on autopilot, he lined up his feet behind the faded white line; left foot forward, toe inches from the line and the right foot set shoulder-length behind. He raised his hands together above his head and squinted at an imaginary sun. His right hand dropped behind his head, gripping an imaginary racquet and his left fell and rose again, tossing the ball of air high to arc above him. He pictured it suspended, his right arm slicing through the air to contact it and send it sailing over the drooping net.

He rushed the net now, feet moving in a practiced way, advancing and then setting at the service line, preparing for the return that would inevitably come. He deflected it with his racquet of memory and closed the gap to the net. The next shot would be an overhead, he knew, and he backed up slowly, his left finger following the ball's path through the sky until it reached the perfect point and his right arm rose to slam it back at his opponent with a force that guaranteed a win.

He pumped his fist with victory, hearing the cheering in his mind. But his smile faded when the only sounds that reached him were those of crickets and car engines. There would be no more cheering, not for him. His shoulder pulsed with pain and he rubbed in regretfully. Enough memories for tonight. He headed home.

~*~*~*~

He could afford to take things easy, he was ahead 6-4, 4-2 and he had broken his opponent twice already in this set. Something could be taken off his serve and he could focus on placement instead.

He shook his head and sweat drops flew in every direction. He hunched over and let the ball drop from his fingers. It hit the court with a hollow thud and his racquet strings twanged at the impact as the

ball bounced once, twice, three times. He glanced over at his opponent, crouched and ready for the serve, his racquet wavering in front of him like a fencer's sword.

Michael let his eyes travel over to the stands. His parents sat there, smiles fixed firmly in assurance of his victory. Veronica sat next to them, a look of vague worry on her face as though she could read the pain on his face. Maybe she could. Then there was his coach, chatting with a reporter, his shoulders relaxed and his bald pate gleaming. The USTA scout sat nearby, his eyes focused on Michael with a greedy intensity.

Was this going to be the rest of his life? Match after match, fighting pain and exhaustion? Icing his shoulders or shins or knees to combat the swelling? His own body was as much of an opponent as any enemy he met on the court. And every day, he'd have to wage the constant mental war against depression, doubt, and rage.

It would kill him, he knew that. If not physically, than in spirit. But there was no quitting, not now, not when everyone expected so much of him. Disappointed faces paraded in his mind and he shrank from them. No one would understand.

Well, he'd give them something they could understand.

~*~*~*~*

"I did really good at the tournament last week," Callie informed him.

Michael continued to dutifully spread the peanut butter on the bread. "That's what your mother told me. We're both very proud of you." He slapped the bread together and handed the sandwich to his daughter. She took it from him and bit it, her eyes still on him.

"Illooeacheetndis?" She inquired, her speech unintelligibly through a mouthful of bread and peanut butter.

"Callie Girl, you need to swallow. I don't speak peanut butter."

She did so. "Will you teach me how to play tennis?" She asked, after gulping down some milk.

He busied himself with putting away the peanut butter jar and bread. "We'll see."

"That's what Momma says when she means no."

"Well, it's not a 'no.' It's a 'maybe later.'" He didn't elaborate, and thankfully Callie didn't pursue the subject.

~*~*~*~*

He tossed the ball before he could change his mind and drew his racquet back behind his head. When the ball reached its zenith, it hesitated for the briefest second. Perfect placement.

He snapped his arm forward with all the force of a catapult. His strings struck the ball squarely, but he didn't feel it. All he could feel was the roaring flame of agony that flared to life from the dull embers that had been kindled. The fire spread up his arm and down his back. His numb fingers released the smooth grip and his racquet clattered to the hard surface, followed closely by his knees as he pitched forward. He knew he had screamed something, but he didn't know what it was.

Dully, he recalled the return whizzing past him, but he paid it no heed. He was on his back now, staring up into the sky and the burning eye of a sun. Above him, clouds drifted idyllically. There was no yelling, no commotion as his coach came onto the court to quietly ask him what was wrong. This was a gentlemen's game.

Veronica came to pick up their daughter on Sunday night. She approached him while Callie was picking up her things, which was foreboding. "Michael, Callie can't come next weekend."

He was taken aback. "What?"

"She did well enough to move on to Sectionals for her age group, so I think that takes precedence," Veronica said stiffly, deliberately not looking at him. He knew her well enough to see that she felt guilty, but was too proud to admit it.

He turned to face her and lowered his voice. "C'mon Ronny, we've been planning this for over a month. Don't do this."

"Don't you blame me," she shot back in a furious whisper. "She wants to do this."

He shook his head, eyes blazing. "She's a little girl, not a professional athlete. All she knows is that you want her to do this. Don't deny her the chance to be a kid."

"She's not you, Michael," Veronica snapped.

Silence fell. Veronica averted her eyes and stared out the window, her cheeks flushed. In that moment, he realized that she knew. Maybe she'd known since that day she'd rushed to hold his hand in the hospital bed. Maybe she'd figured it out before wishing him luck as they wheeled him to surgery. Maybe she'd known all these years that they'd lived under the same roof and slept in the same bed.

Michael took a moment to breathe in and out, then he raised her chin with his fingers so that she had to meet his hard gaze. "I know. And I don't want her to become me." He paused. "What happened between us...I understand that I failed. I've never been good at dealing with my problems. But we don't have to make the same mistakes with our daughter, Ronny. She's the only one we'll ever have. I want her to be better and to be braver than I ever was."

Veronica stared at him for a long moment before nodding slightly, resisting the pressure of his fingers still on her chin. He released her and stepped back. "I'm going to go say good-bye to her now. You can wait outside if you want." He turned and left the room. When he entered Callie's bedroom, he heard the front door shut.

Callie was lying on her bed, pretending to read a book. He sat next to her. "What's up, Callie Girl?" He asked with forced joviality.

She didn't look up. "Nothin'."

"You ready to go with your mom?"

She didn't answer, she simply turned another page. He tried a different tact. "Hon, what's wrong?"

"You and Momma are fighting again," she muttered sullenly. "I thought you'd stop now that you don't live together anymore."

He sighed and smoothed a hand over her hair. It was messy, like his always seemed to be. "Sweetie, I'm sorry."

She half-rolled over to look up at him. "Do you hate Momma?"

Instead of answering, he reached down and picked her up with ease. He set her on his lap and wrapped his arms around her, setting his chin on top of her head. "No, I could never hate your mommy. You know why? Because she gave me you."

“Really?”

He grinned. “Really.”

She pushed his arms aside so she could shift to look at him. “Why didn’t you come to see my competition last week?”

Ah. That was a harder question to answer. “Honey, do you like gymnastics?”

“Uh-huh. My teacher says I’m real good.”

“I want you to promise me something,” he said. “I want you to promise me that as soon as you stop liking gymnastics, you’ll stop competing. Okay?”

She stared, wide-eyed. “But what if I like it always?”

“Then you better never quit.”

She thought about this. “Okay, but you have to swear that you’ll come to every meet you can.”

He pretended to think about it. “You drive a hard bargain,” he conceded. She solemnly offered her pinky and they shook on it. “One more question,” he said. “What do you want to do next weekend? Go to the fair or to your meet? It’s entirely up to you, hon,” he added hastily. “Mommy and I won’t be mad, no matter what you pick.”

She picked at a thread on her blanket. The little pink thread hardly seemed a threat, but the snag could unravel the whole thing. Michael made a note to fix it later. “Daddy, I want to go to the meet.”

He tried not to let his disappointment show. “Well, then I’ll be there.”

“But there’s a fair in Somerset, too— in two weeks,” She said hurriedly. “I saw it on TV.” Somerset was a good ways away, but it wasn’t out of the question, as long as Veronica gave her blessing.

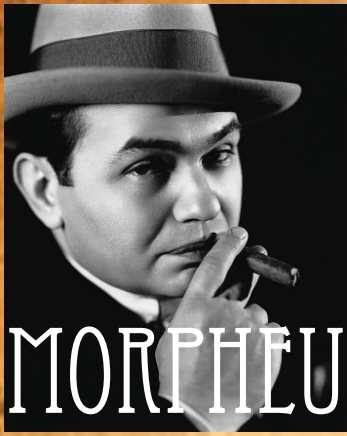
He tousled his daughter’s hair. “Well, I’ll see what I can do about that.” She ducked and rolled onto the bed, giggling. He picked her up and threw her over his good shoulder. “Let’s go, your mom’s waiting.” He carried her out to the car, her bag in his free hand. Veronica was in the car, tapping the steering wheel impatiently. But he saw her lips curve into a smile at the sound of their daughter’s laughter.

He released his little girl carefully next to the car and put her bags inside. He hugged her and kissed her on top of the head. “I’ll see you next weekend, okay?”

“Okay.”

“And next time you come over, bring your tennis shoes. I’m going to teach you how to play my favorite sport in the world.”

She beamed at him and he closed the door gently. He waved as the car pulled away, down the colorless street. Then he rolled his sleeves up and set off for the corner lot. He had some work to do if he wanted to bring this place back to life.



THE TRAIN AND THE YARD

BY: BRENT HOLMES

I had a dream one night. I was on a train speeding through a night from my childhood. Out the window the trees were a blur, dancing in a jerky, maudlin fashion. I could see myself as a child looking out that window afraid of the terrors of the dark shapes bending and branching outside.

The door to the room slid open and this big man in a top-hat came in. He was dressed as if going to an evening party and he had a vast toothy smile that looked like could eat me alive in one gulp—teeth so massive he did not need to chew, just bite.

Both myself and the child me were afraid of this man as he sauntered into the seat across from us, jiggling from a deep, throaty chuckle. He took out a pocket watch on a silver chain, and I thought, *How gaudy, a golden watch on a silver chain?*

His eye darted to me. Suddenly I didn't feel so invisible.

"You certainly have a wounding tongue for one with your profession."

Silence filled the car as he continued to consult the watch. His toady eyes drifted from the watch to the child me and with a start I realized that the younger me was growing older and older, almost imperceptively.

"Who are you to look down on what I do? What is it you do?" I said after mustering courage into my heart. He gave another chilling chuckle as he continued to look between the watch and the boy.

"Men focus far too much on what they do... I prefer to look at myself as what I have done."

"And what have you done?"

"The thing that I do, young master. You see, by many a man's definition I am a thief. A taker in the night; much like this night. But what I consider myself to be is a broker. A deal-maker. A buyer and seller of things... ethereal." As the younger me grew closer and closer to my current age, the woods outside became slower and slower in their movement— no longer a torrent of sound and energy, the trees become closer to what they've always been— standing still. As the trees stop, the young me became my age.

"What are you doing here then Mr. Broker? Not a lot of money in my profession."

"Ah. There is a lot of potential here, however— Well. Was." He took his hat from the top rack and went out the door with a "Ta" and another throaty chuckle.

Outside the trees are stopped but it's still dark. The other me stares out the window and looks back to me, saying "At least we won't crash and die."

Then Myc woke me up in the usual manner it I'm late – he poured my breakfast on my head.

"I've often wondered sonny, why you're doing this particular business." Myc whispers out of the corner of his white-stubble lined mouth. I smell like milk set out in the sun, because that's what is on my clothes at the moment. Perfect funeral-wear.

Across the lawn from our shack, a young soldier is being buried. Even from here I can still make out the usual suspects—the bereaved young widow supported by the proud older brother wearing his military regalia, the lost looking father gripping and supporting the mother whose showy moment of going to pieces is almost seconded from the strange distance the other guests maintain. It's as if they are intensely carrying out a routine chore with some slight awe- mechanical movements hinted with slight hesitation and closed-mouth respect. No-one looks at each other.

Although it's slightly garbled from distance and weeping, the priest says the final words on the matter of the young man and sprinkles some dirt on his coffin in the exposed grave. Others follow suit. I cannot help but notice what a terribly nice day it is, and simultaneously imagine that he, like so many others, thought their funeral would be interrupted by a down-pour, as if the heavens were crying from the loss of an extraordinary man. What most people don't even think about is how much easier it is on the survivors for it to be a sunny day.

I don't think about my funeral too much. I wouldn't have anyone come, except for Myc.

But he'd just be there to bury me.

"The ambiance," I reply as the procession slinks away and the wind kicks a fresh whiff of milk into my nose once more. We heft our shovels and close in as the last of the living go out of sight.

As we're walking over I remember the big man with the pocket watch from my dream and I realize that I haven't aged very much in the past year. Sure, I've learned things, as much as you can learn in the yard, but I still truly feel the same as when I came. Right on the cusp of things.

I suppose the only difference is that instead of being on the cusp, ready to jump, I've decided to sit down.

"Well, I'm only saying," Myc continued, "You're a bright young lad. I know you know that, I see you reading those books every night with them big words in them I cannot pronounce. How on earth do you end up here?" Myc shoves his shovel into the mound of dirt and deposits the load into the hole. Just like the mourners we've entered our routine. The great cycle.

"Am I not doing a good job?"

"What? No, you know I'm not saying that, stop being stupid."

"I needed the money. And like I said; ambiance." I deposit dirt onto the young man. Myc scoffs.

"Ambeeince." We set about our work quietly and I study the tombstone as I go. *Here lies Private Wallace Jacobs, Infantry. Died for our Country. God rest his soul.* From the tombstone I can tell it's a poor family—it looks like it's been chiseled from a boulder. He was 20. I was 20 once. Myc was as well.

You have to figure that everyone is aware that they're going to die—but there's this point you reach after which, it's not so tragic... maybe not a point but at least a continuum.

"Alright, humor me. You've been here for a year and I've nare asked a question. You've done good work so I've never had to bother with you. You don't look like one of those creepy death-lover people, you're a young man, highly educated AND probably smart... you're a downright... whatchacallit, contradiction here. Just tell me what you're doing here already."

"I have an abiding interest in the upkeep of graveyards." Myc heaves a shovel full of dirt at me and I laugh. "Alright, alright." We both stop and lean on our shovels. I point over the hill a ways. "Both of my parents

are buried right over there." Myc's eyes open wide and the corners of his mouth descend.

"I shouldn't of asked. Sorry." He starts to set back to work again. I sit down.

"No, it's alright. My dad was a doctor and my mom was sick. Simple as that. Dad was trying to take care of mom but she... well, she couldn't hold on anymore. I remember I'd never seen him like that after mom passed. He used to be very... I don't know... vivacious. Full of life. He was always bustling back and forth between things, taking care of people, pulling off the most miraculous recoveries... he was like a magician. Maybe I only just saw him during the good times. But afterwards... he just sat in his chair most days never talked as much. It was tough; we didn't have any extended family- it was always just us. Friends would come by but it never helped much at all. Then one day I'm away at academy and I get a letter saying that my dad was dead. He'd shot himself. Right after the funeral I walked over to your shack and started working here."

I sit and let Myc digest it all for a time before picking up my shovel and continuing. The rest of the time we bury Wallace, we do so in silence.

A gravestone really is about your life, in the end. Take for example the obelisk that was now jamming it's finger defiantly into the sky. Also take into account the mahogany casket with gold trimming and a regal looking seal on the face of it.

Myc laughs.

"They really end up in the same place, in the end eh?" He chuckles some more. "Yup, no matter how heavy the dimes on yer eyes, right?"

"I suppose."

"Oh, you're no fun."

Pilling the dirt on the gold, it did seem awfully funny.

"Y'see, people like this, they worked to hard for something to have it just mean nothing in the end, right? So, they try to cram it all in, right? This poor sod probably wasn't that happy, but damnit, was he wanting to show people how successful he was!" Myc cackled again with another shovelful of dirt.

We never hear much about the people we're laying to rest. The most of what we receive are measurements for the hole and a place to put in the grave. We usually get the grave the day before the burial and set it in as we dig the hole. Today I hate our job.

Of everything I buried I hate the ones that need smaller holes- the smaller the worst. Not because I have a special love for little people- it just goes along with what I was saying earlier about that continuum; the shorter the span the sadder it is.

Today we need an adult sized hole and a baby sized hole.

Myc takes his job seriously, but with most things that Myc takes seriously, he somehow adds a twinge of humor to the deed.

"I'm thinking... she got depressed. Unable to sustain herself and her kid, she killed herself and her kid."

"Myc, that's not really funny."

"Just making an observation. Either that or it was a miscarriage that went wrong."

"Myc! Really. I don't want to talk about it."

"No need to become emotional, lad. I'm only messing."

"I really wish you wouldn't joke about someone like that."

"Why not?"

"It's disrespectful to the dead!"

I'm fairly certain that the people in town probably, at that singular moment looked toward the graveyard and asked themselves who was laughing so loudly.

"Disrespectful? God lad I thought you'd have learned by now." He chuckled lightly and heaved another shovelful of dirt. "They're dead. The only thing you can disrespect is somethin' that's alive, y'see. What difference is it gonna make her if I make fun of her? Plus, wasn't really makin' *fun*... more jus'... what's that word, speculatin'?"

"Sure I guess- but you have to admit that the whole thing is a little sad."

"Well of course it's sad! Death's a sad thing. Believe me I've had it up to here with you cold intellectual types saying 'Oh, it's just a natural process—everyone goes through it.' Well of course it is, doesn't make it any happier an occasion."

"Usually people say things of that sort when they're trying to stay distant from it."

"And that's just your lot's problem. So distant from everythin'."

"Who says they're my lot? If I were one of them, I wouldn't be here right now, would I?"

"Ah, so you're runnin' from the lifestyle, right? I don't get you lad—why would you want a life like this?"

I didn't want to answer and I didn't want the conversation to continue. These were questions I didn't even want to ask myself. It was strange after the funeral—it was as if I knew that I had to go and work with Myc or nothing. I couldn't even imagine another life. Myc thankfully dropped it and we finished our work.

When the funeral procession arrived, the two bodies were buried. A wife looked on among the procession. Myc grunted.

"Suppose I was off the mark on that one." As they went away he shrugged, "Oh well, take out the dirt, put it back in. Cycle goes on."

I'm back in the dream again and the train has stopped. The other me is still looking out the window almost dumbfoundedly. I felt adventurous as I slid the compartment door open and stepped into the hallway. Despite being stopped, the car still moved from side to side as if buffeted by the train's high speeds. Some things you just can't affect, I suppose. I walked through the car and looked into the other cabins, seeing no-one else on the train. As I approached the door at the end of the car I could smell a smoky, pungent odor wafting from it. I opened the door and beyond it was a small observation railing, looking out on the still tracks and the still night. The Broker stood there, smoking a cigarette in a holder.

"Ah! You've come to join me have you? Come out now; it's rude to hover in doorways behind someone's back."

I hesitated before walking out onto the iron grating and sliding the door shut behind me. The car continued to shake to and fro despite the fact that the area around was perfectly still.

"Are you doing this? Making the car shake like this?"

"The car? Oh heavens no; I have no control over the car, just the speed of the train. And technically I've done nothing. As I said before, I just took advantage of an opportunity... one you presented."

"What are you talking about? Did you take something from me?"

"Take? No, was given. Shall I remind you of the terms? You seem to be somewhat confused, young master." He took a long drag of the cigarette, but the cigarette stayed the same length, the end growing to a hellish red. "The bargain was as follows; you give me your potential and you stay safe. Have I not been performing my end of the deal admirably for the past year? Are you not completely without any injury, physical, mental, or emotional?"

I paused. Whatever it was that I'd given him... my 'potential' as he put it, had kept me safe. I thought about my job as a grave digger... nothing safer, really.

"What bothers me is that I never made this deal. You say I agreed to the terms, but I cannot remember them at all, or even seeing you before the other night."

"What you remember or forget is of little consequence to me."

"What if I don't want to keep this deal? What if I want back what's mine?" He laughed his bone-rattling chuckle once more, smoke issuing from his nostrils like a steam engine.

"You can't go back on a deal; especially this one. I happen to be enjoying your potential far too much to just 'give it back'!" He laughed again. "Besides, why would I want your safety? That does not interest me."

"What if I could find something else in trade then?" He took an extended drag of the cigarette, the tip of the cigarette growing redder and redder as he drew in an unseemly amount of breath- I began to feel the heat from the tiny flame from where I was standing. Finally he bellowed out all the smoke he had taken into his lungs, the blackness rolling out like a chimney from a live fire.

"Of course. Bring me something to trade and we'll see what I decide then. For now—Ta."

I woke up in the shack on my bed. Myc's snores damn near shake the cabin walls. I look over at the door groggily and see that the sun is shining down on our shovels. As is customary, I get up and start cooking breakfast for the two of us, being the first one up. I let the smell of the eggs wake Myc up rather than dumping it on his head.

"So what are ye gonna give to him?" Myc asked in a quiet tone.

"I don't know Myc. It's just a dream." What had started as a playful retelling of a strange dream had suddenly flowered into a serious discussion; a discussion I found myself wanting to avoid in hindsight.

"Hmph. Dream like that isn't just a dream. That's one you just don't ignore." He speared an egg yolk with his fork before shoving it into his mouth. Finished, he sat back and rubbed his whiskers.

"It was far too weird to mean anything. You cannot just *give* your potential away."

"Ye seem to be though."

"What does that mean?"

"What are you doing here lad?"

"I... I'm working. Alright? I'm doing a job, I'm doing *something*."

"You can do more than this, though, you know that right?"

"I do not want to talk about this anymore. Frankly I am sorry to bring the whole subject up in the first

place.” I picked up the plates and took them to the sink. “It was just a dream. Something my brain created out of confusion of electrical impulses going on in my sleep state. Making nonsense out of chaos.”

“But when those two things connect so well, right after another; you’re just gonna ignore that? God’s sake lad, you just said it’s all chaos, right? What’s chaotic about somethin’ that connects so well?”

“I don’t want to talk about it anymore. What are we doing today?” Myc sighed, dropping the conversation.

“You know the answer to the lad, the same thing every day. Dig the hole, fill the hole.”

There are times where I hate the routine, if not for the spirit which hangs around the job, more for the repetition. If you had told me there was no excitement in the job, I would have agreed with you, even before taking it. In fact the only assumption I had was that people who took this job had some fascination with death, some prerequisite amount of morbid diversion. But it is quite surprising to see how quickly one becomes accustomed to the work. It stops being a body being buried, and more a part of the everyday.

After a year, this is the outlook I had over the dead: matter, nothing more, nothing less. The weight that was eventually heaved into the places we dug, and the places we filled, was just that; a weight. At first I took this with a profound feeling of sadness over the passage of a life- a physical object that once had such energy reduced. The longer I dug though, the more I realized that this motion I was attributing life to was also just that—there was nothing unique from it. I became, to a certain extent, immune to the charms of life.

“Ye hafta figure,” Myc would say, “that if there’s an afterlife, there’s some lingerin’ connection between yer body and yer... soul or what have you, yeah? So. You’re in heaven or hell or whatever when all the sudden you feel worms get in you and dirt getting’ piled on you. Y’know? Considerin’ that, I think I’d want to go down below. ‘cause if the tortures of hell are so terrible, I’d want to be reminded of being alive—but if I’m in heaven? Jeez it would be like a bad memory.”

Myc had always been more of a romantic anyway.

After a time I began to have the same dream again and again; I would be on that platform on the back of the train with the Broker and he would sigh, looking at me expectantly. I would wake up after a time, and had made the mistake of telling Myc about this.

“Now you’re convinced though, right? There’s more to that dream.”

“Okay, assuming that there is ‘more’ to this, what am I supposed to do? I can’t exactly give him my potential again, can I?”

“You could steal it back.”

“I have the feeling that whatever this thing is, it isn’t going to let it go like that; wait no. I’m not having this conversation. It’s a dream, Myc.”

“What if it’s not? What do you have to lose talkin’ about nonsense anyway? Is it going to distract from our busy work schedule?”

“Ah. So you’re only interested because you’re bored.”

“No, I’m interested ‘cause it sounds like this thing’s got your soul.”

I stopped shoveling.

“Myc, what are you talking about?”

"Well, I figure... you decided to work here on a whim right? Your life was goin' down one particular path and then all the sudden you start doin' this? It sounds like it took somethin' from you, and well, soul theft happens all the time, right?"

"No, are you saying that I made a deal with the Devil so I could work at a graveyard?"

"I'm not saying that—"

"You remember that I was working to be a doctor, right? Why on earth would I pick this to waste my soul on when I could have been a doctor?!"

"Exactly lad, what are you doing here?"

My lips clamped shut tightly, and I swayed back slightly. I still wanted to be a doctor. But I was here. Why? Myc stopped shoveling also, and propped himself on the shovel.

"You're still studyin', while you're here. I know you're not diggin' up bodies, and I'm not exactly a professor of medicine, but you're still trying to figure something out. That's why you're still reading those books all the time, innit? You failed some exam or something, your parents died, so you thought, 'I'd go into hiding for a bit, then pop out of the blue knowing everything I failed on,' right? Triumphant return?"

"No, that's not it."

"God damn you boy, Why are you HERE then?!" He threw his shovel into the hole. "You're here talking about how you could have been a doctor, readin' yer fancy books and lamenting about your damn dead parents so why don't you go out and DO something about it, you great git?!"

I couldn't really respond. I retrieved Myc's shovel out of the hole, tossed it at his feet and started to dump dirt on the casket. He stood there for a moment, breathing heavily, his face getting red, before picking up his shovel and throwing it off into the distance, before storming off.

There's a hill in the yard with a dead tree. Myc liked to sit under the tree because of the 'ironing', as he described it. His word, of course. Along with the tree, the sunsets on the hill are something remarkable—it's high enough to look over the whole of the yard, which is flat and dominated by the grey slabs stuck in the ground. From the hill you can see the forest that borders the yard to the west and the town to the east. The forest is dark, deep, and unwelcoming, just as it is to the east of the yard, except for the lack of trees.

Myc sat there like a fuming adolescent under the tree, his legs drawn into his hugging arms, he stared out over the yard. I stood looking at the scene from behind for a while, the sun setting behind the old man under the dead tree.

"Why did you get so upset?" He glanced back and stared hard at me before patting the ground next to him. I sat down next to him, crossing my legs and abandoning my shovel next to me.

"You're such a young kid. How old are you? 20? Yer 20." He says it without waiting for me to reply, still staring at the yard. "This is an old man's game. This is passing the time before you die, lad. An' since you're 20, you've got a whole lot of life left. So why are you sitting around here, just trading that in?"

"It's a job."

"Bullshit! You could be doing anything you want; so why the hell are you *here*?!" He took a deep breath and let out a sigh. "You've been working for me for a year. I demand a straight answer."

"Would you fire me if I refused?"

"If it comes down to it." I thought about the day of the funeral, and tried to touch on that feeling that made

me run.

"My dad, he failed. He failed so badly that it took his own life. How could I—How could I put myself in that situation? If I can't do my job, if I became a doctor, people get sent here. And how many people could I send here before I ended up like my father?"

"How many people are ending up here because you won't follow your damn father?" There was a silence as the sun finally rested under the horizon and the moonlight cast a strange glare on Myc's face. "Tomorrow, you're going back into town and going back to the academy to finish up your school. Shut your mouth. You had a nice little vacation but you can't jump out of life like that. People get hurt; people die. You can't jump off from the things you're supposed to do- the things you *like* to do just because you're just now realizing that. I'll bet more than a penny your dad knew that and accepted it. And he's a damn idiot for not drilling that into your head early on. Do you understand me?"

My time in the yard had come to an end, as of that moment, I knew that. In my mind I also was thinking of other places I could go—once I left here, what would Myc do to keep up with me, after all? I could go anywhere, but not there. As much as I may have wanted to, but not with those consequences—

Suddenly Myc bolted upright- faster than any man of his age should have been able to, his eyes fixed on the giant obelisk with the dead rich man. There were two men with shovels and a lantern digging away. We didn't know them.

"Stay here. Watch them. Don't let them see you." He said before bolting off toward the shack. I sat there stunned in silence as I watched the men go about their work, the soft 'chuk-chuking' of their shovels mixing with the cicadas in the forest. When Myc returned, he had his rifle slung over his shoulder. "Grab your shovel and come with me. Know what you're doing, don't just look it." We approached the men silently, Myc's rifle pointed toward them. When we had maneuvered our way to their back, we snuck to a few feet behind them, crouching behind some of the markers. Myc looked over to me and nodded, popping out from behind his marker, with me following behind, hesitantly.

"Alright you!" He said in a booming voice. "Put those damn shovels down and get out of my damned graveyard!" The two men put their arms up into the air, dropping their shovels in the process. They looked like they had been put in a barrel of soot, refuse and ill morality and set to roll down a hill. But they did not move. "I said leave, you gits!"

The shot rang out. The two men put their arms down and I looked to my left to see Myc on the ground, panting and bleeding from the chest, rifle too far to reach. A third man stepped into the lantern light with a pistol in his hand. While a glaring smile he shot again and my leg buckled in pain. The men laughed and one approached me, my shovel in his hand. With a nod, he brought the spade down on my head and my vision went black.

When I woke in the hospital bed, I knew already that I would never walk the same again. I had read enough about phantom limb to know that the feeling that my leg was shorter and bent in the shape of a pretzel was a dead sure sign. After a while of agony, I looked around me. A nondescript hospital room. Myc was nowhere. A passing by nurse in the hallway looked in on a whim and saw me glancing about and rushed in.

"You're awake!"

"I suppose I am."

The nurse went on to explain what had happened. The priest, having not met with Myc for that day went over the grounds to try to find him, and found him and myself near the empty grave, with the casket opened. Myc was dead.

After she told me all of this, the police came in and I described what had happened, deadpan. After a day that seemed to last a lifetime, I drifted to sleep.

I limped on a crutch to the back of the car, where the Broker was smoking. After sliding the door open he chuckled, his back turned for me.

“So young master, what have you brought in trade?”

“Nothing. But you will give me back what was mine; you have failed to live up to your end of the bargain.”

He laughed again, still looking out on the tracks. “A bold claim boy, what makes you—” He turned around and saw my crutches, and where my leg used to be. A silence descended between us, broken by the sound of the train trying to jostle into life. “I see.”

“I hope you do. Now give me back what we traded. You couldn’t keep me safe.”

His lips pursed together tightly. His eyes narrowed. I could see that even this didn’t have a loophole for him to slip through. Inhaling deeply from the cigarette, he begrudgingly reached into his pocket, taking out the pocket watch on the silver chain and holding it out. I hobbled over to him and snatched it from his hand before turning and opening the door. He laughed for a final time.

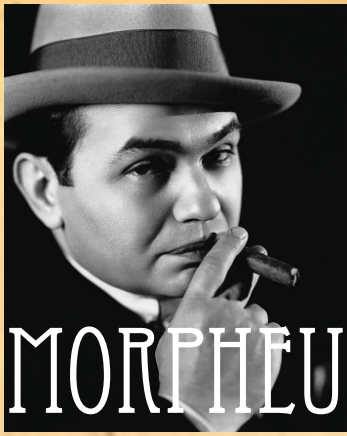
“You know, in the end, I did get one thing.”

“Oh?”

“Your leg, you stupid boy, I’ll always have your leg from this whole deal!” He bellowed out a laugh which shook the train to life and it began to speed forward into the night. I shut the door.

I was able to walk in time for Myc’s funeral. The priest, being attentive, knew that the tree was Myc’s favorite spot and buried him in the shadow of the bough. In the meantime he had also hired a new grave digger, since I was absent as well. I told him that Myc had fired me that night anyway. Standing at Myc’s grave, I began to cry. Here was a man who had once had more life than me, now dead, gone, in the ground. I wished I could trade places with him, but only for a fleeting moment as I remembered what he told me mere minutes before his death.

Leaving the yard for the final time, I hobbled my way toward the academy, books in my arms.



RICHARD'S SAMURAI

BY: NATTY BERRY

MORPHEUS '10

One night, Richard wished for a Samurai. Richard had always thought that Samurais were totally badass, and he reasoned that if he had a Samurai, he would be pretty much un-fucked around with at school. Richard was the kind of sixth grader who got his ass kicked every day by enormous and intellectually bankrupt seventh and eighth graders, kids who turned middle school into a kind of war zone. Richard figured that if he raised his hand more often in class and if he answered every question as fast as he could, maybe people would stop kicking his ass every day. And when that didn't work, he wished for a Samurai.

The Samurai waited for Richard the next morning by the tree where the bus would come to pick kids up every morning. Richard hated that tree as much as he hated school, but it did look a lot better with his Samurai leaning against it. Some kid would normally have hit Richard with a backpack or a stick until the bus arrived, but Richard was given a wide berth that morning, his erstwhile enemies unnerved by the Samurai's silent gaze, and by the way his gaunt hand rested on the hilt of a razor sharp sword.

Richard had been worried that his Samurai would not be allowed on the bus, as the Samurai was armed with a deadly weapon, and certainly not on the bus driver's pickup list. But it turned out that Richard's fears were unfounded, and as the bus driver completely ignored the Samurai as he walked behind Richard up the narrow, gum-encrusted stairs and onto the bus.

Richard had always loved sitting in the back of the bus, so he could look out the rear window at the drivers behind them. But Richard hardly ever got there first, and even when he did some bigger boy would kick him out of the back seat, leaving Richard to fend for himself on the floor of the always overcrowded bus. In the company of his Samurai, however, Richard was sure he could have the back all to himself, and this proved to be the case. At one of the stops a group of eighth graders tried briefly to occupy Richard's seat, but at the first nervous glimpse of the Samurai they moved off into the middle of the bus, exchanging uneasy whispers.

First bell rang, and Richard found himself sitting in the front of the class, his Samurai sitting cross legged on the floor beside him. First hour was math, and as usual Richard was the only one who had done his homework. The teacher, who had so clearly never attended middle school, publicly thanked Richard for his responsible behavior, and implored the other students to follow Richard's fine and mature example, all the while tactfully ignoring the presence of Richard's Samurai. While the teacher's back was turned to the class, an embarrassed and disgruntled student lobbed a projectile made from crumpled paper at the back of Richard's head. Richard's Samurai snatched effortlessly the missile out of the air, tossing it casually aside without so much as a backwards glance.

There was some trouble again, when Richard's third hour social studies class broke into small groups, and Richard and his Samurai were separated, Richard's group being responsible for a presentation on James A. Garfield, while the Samurai's group was responsible for a presentation on Grover Cleveland. Although he was only trying to be helpful, Richard earned nothing but the disdain of his group partners. One tall athletic kid even went so far as to call Richard a little faggot, and threatened physical violence against Richard for being such a little faggot. Overhearing this, the Samurai was quick to act. He swept up Richard's tormentor in one hand, and dragged him by the collar into the hallway. Richard heard a muffled cry, and then saw his Samurai return to the classroom alone.

There was a substitute teacher in fourth hour English, and the sub, overwhelmed by the notion of executing a lesson plan, had Richard and his classmates sit in silence for the forty-five minute class period. Stickers were awarded to the quietest and least animated students. Richard received one that said "You're a Star," and Richard's Samurai earned one that said "GREAT" in enormous blue letters.

Lunch followed, and Richard sat in the far corner as he usually did, only now he had the Samurai to keep him company. Richard hated the cafeteria, it was loud and smelly and disgusting, but having the Samurai around meant that no one took his chocolate milk or his grape icy, so that was something good. The Samurai ate very little, and talked not at all, and lunch passed as it usually did—silently. Richard passed the time by grammatically correcting the graffiti scrawled upon his table.

The day passed uneventfully until seventh hour gym class. Richard knew that seventh hour gym class, Richard's final class, could make or break the day. It was Monday, and Monday meant Cardio Day. Cardio Day meant running around the outside track, and running around the outside track meant sweat,

and dust, and chest pain, and people pointing and laughing. But Richard had gotten it into his head that this Monday would be different. Arrayed in dirty and unflattering Gym clothes, Richard and his class sallied out onto the track, which on most days presented itself to Richard as an oppressive and uncaring oval of dust and brutality. Everyone except for Richard lined up at the starting line and took off at the sounding of the whistle, the athletic kids speeding ahead in order to impress and inspire everyone else, and everyone else meandering along at an unimpressed and uninspired pace. Richard sat in the shade of the school's fortress walls, his Samurai standing beside him, hand casually resting on the hilt of his sword.

It took Richard's gym teacher a full three minutes to notice Richard where he sat, and thirty seconds for his gym teacher brain to process the full scope of Richard's lack of participation, and even more egregious, his obvious lack of school spirit. The gym teacher lumbered over to Richard and the Samurai's position, seeming to Richard to resemble a cross between Mussolini and a grizzly bear. The teacher loomed over Richard, and opened his mouth to drown Richard in rebuke. But he was slow to speak, and the Samurai was quick to act. Richard's Samurai drew his sword and slashed upwards in one flawless motion, re-sheathing the shimmering blade in the time it took for the Gym teacher to topple to the ground. The assistant gym teacher leapt into action, declared Cardio Day over, and led the weary students back inside the school.

Now the day was almost over, and one locker room change was all that stood between Richard and an evening of freedom. The sudden death of the gym teacher did not concern Richard's classmates greatly, and, as his absence from the locker room allowed them greater freedom, his death went unlamented. Unsupervised as the locker room was, chaos inevitably began to reign. Boys armed with rolled towels or combination locks began to engage in a full scale war, of the sort of orderless brutality only middle school boys can achieve. Normally, in times of war such as these, Richard would fear for his safety, but his Samurai stood cross armed in front of him as he changed, all interlopers deterred by the Samurai's casual glare and the memory of the slaughtered gym teacher.

But when war descends on a locker room, nothing is safe, and no outcome is impossible. A combination lock, thrown aimlessly by one of the combatants, flew wildly and struck Richard on the temple before even the Samurai could react. Richard's shout of pain rang out over the din, and his Samurai sprung into action, unsheathing his sword and unleashing a deafening war cry. Everyone in the locker room heard, and went suddenly silent, Richard's Samurai looking at everyone in the room, and everyone in the

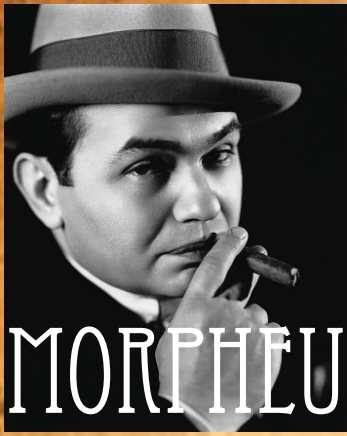
room looking at Richard's Samurai.

Three hundred and forty three seconds later, silence was all that remained in the Locker Room. Richard remembered being swept up and hoisted onto the Samurai's shoulders, while the Samurai let forth a terrible cry and plunged into the throng of enraged middle schoolers. Richard's world descended into a miasma of blood-choked cries and silent slicing stainless steel. The screaming and the dying was almost too much for Richard, and he closed his eyes as he clung tightly to his Samurai's shoulders. Richard's classmates had banded together at the last, and tried to make a stand, but were count down and discarded until at now only Richard and his Samurai remained standing in the locker room. The Samurai wiped crimson blood off of his sword and onto a gym towel, and walked with sandaled feet out of the locker room into the hall.

Outside, Richard and his Samurai were met by Richard's principal, a grim and dour expression on his face. The principal expressed severe disappointment in Richard, explaining that Samurai were not to be brought to school under any circumstances, and that in the real world serious consequences would be attached to this kind of inappropriate behavior. Although the principal's words gave Richard pause, the Samurai gave no heed to the chiding voice, and severed the principal's frowning head from its body in one swift swing.

There were fewer kids on the bus ride home, and Richard had no trouble getting the back seat. His Samurai sat in the next seat forward, and cleaned his sword wordlessly. Richard almost expected to feel uneasy about his Samurai, but he couldn't remember a better day of middle school. At the bus stop the Samurai bowed to Richard, but did not get off the bus, and Richard knew that he would never see his Samurai again. Doubtless other children needed a Samurai, and Richard was never one to selfishly hog something as badass as a Samurai. Richard slept well that night, and although he never saw the Samurai again, for the rest of the school year Richard went about his business in peace.

NON -FICTION



THESE TREELIMBS BEND

BY: BRENT HOLMES

So you're supposed to represent yourself in ninety seconds. Not knowing how to do that you pause and look at the mirror as you get up for a can of Coke. That's when you start to see that the tree on your shirt extends out into the sticks of your arms and the claw-branches clutching the top of the unopened can. And you remember when you wished you had antlers, when the girls would compare you to trees; but then you only felt like a little sapling; like you were all green and not too rooted; a fell wind could throw you across the country with the flick of an atmospheric wrist. The future was this great amorphous black cloud inking across the plains toward your tiny little Midwestern suburbia. You would use words like "Midwestern Suburbia" as if they were two bullets cocked at your head instead of seeming like a reasonable community to raise kids. Remember when you never could imagine having kids. You blink and you're in a dorm room three years out into the collegiate life staring at your reflection: the Coke, the tree; everything you wanted to be omitted, because it's still mucking about in your head; the great miasma of change and progress sloshing around and pouring through your ears bit by bit.

It's when the fear hits; when you realize how everything you used to define yourself as was not as unique as you thought, that maybe you were just passing a phase, and now you're in the next one. Everything you're afraid of becoming is starting to lower itself onto you and that's just it, isn't it? You kind of let it because you've seen what happens to the brave ones, the ones that were true and bold and beautiful- the ones who seemed to blossom too quickly; who jumped into the air and got sucked into the tornado while you sat there, partially rooted with your leaves shaking in the torrent.

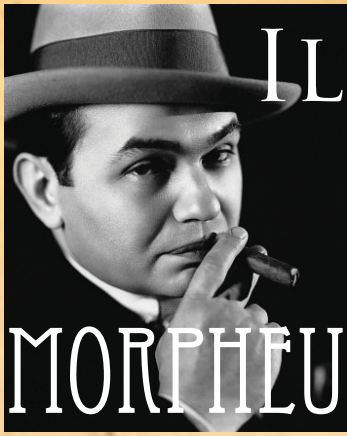
There's comfort though; there's at least the recognition that everything you imagine your future to be is pure illusion. It's when it hits you that you're not really a tree; trees get rooted. Whatever happens to you now has never been pre-ordained; that others haven't been orchestrating the whole show from the beginning. Whatever happens within the next months or years are completely under your yoke; always have been, but you pedaled the wheels. There's a flash of fear though as you remember everyone that helped you to this point; you only hope you helped them as much, that they know you're thankful.

And there are times you wish you did it all over again, did it differently; realized just how free you really were from the beginning, how worth it you were. But you can't and probably wouldn't if you had the chance, so let it go.

For now, you have ninety seconds to represent yourself.

Open the can,

Go.



ILLEGAL STREET RACING, A DESCENT INTO AMERICA'S UNDERWORLD

BY: NATTY BERRY

MORPHEUS '10

At night the highways of America become battlegrounds for adrenaline-hungry car enthusiasts looking to test their mettle in potentially deadly and highly illegal races. Illegal street racing is very common in suburban America, despite the inherent danger not only to everyone involved, but to innocent bystanders as well. I sat down to talk with a veteran racer who is also a Heidelberg University student. For fear of legal repercussions, the racer in this article will be referred to as "Liam."

"Why I do it is simple," Liam says. "It's exhilarating. Not one thing in the world feels quite like it."

Liam insists that the experience of racing is indescribable, and offers to take me along on a ride. We head up one night to Southern Michigan, where Liam says you can get away with driving faster, due to the state's relatively high maximum speed limit. We drive along a divided highway, cruising at 85, ten over the speed limit. Suddenly a black convertible shoots past us, going at least 100. This is apparently viewed by Liam as a challenge, one he's eager to accept.

"The trick to highway driving," Liam tells me, "Is cruising at a fast enough speed so that anyone who overtakes you is of a similar mindset. Either they're someone who just wants to have fun in their car, or it's a twenty-something with a backwards cap in a Dodge Neon with a loud exhaust. Which is to say, someone clearly looking to be put to shame."

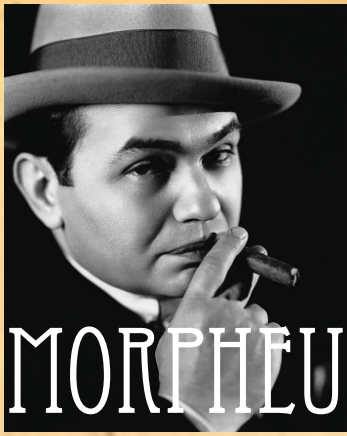
We're going 130 now, faster than I've ever moved outside of an airplane. The dotted line that separates the lanes has merged into one solid yellow ribbon, as we dart past semi-trucks and weave between cars. Liam was absolutely right, this is exhilarating. And frightening; my knuckles are white as I grip the crash handle for dear life. I can't stop smiling in that way you smile when you're sure you're about to die in a pile of twisted, smoldering metal.

I look over to Liam, and he's as calm as could be, one hand on the steering wheel, the other fidget-

ing with a glowing cigarette. We begin to close on the convertible that passed us. I'm sure we'll overtake it, but just as we approach him, he speeds up to avoid being passed. We chase it for a minute or so, following its breakneck path among frantic cars and lumbering truck. Finally it takes a northbound exit toward Detroit, and Liam doesn't follow.

"That's pretty much how races usually go," Liam tells me later, over Wendy's. "It's not the *Fast and the Furious* crap with the gambling and the skanky girls with checkered flags. It always goes down pretty much like that."

Impromptu races such as these are inherently dangerous, and can often turn deadly. Despite his love for the sport, Liam is quick to attest to the dangers of street racing. "In a perfect world, there wouldn't be illegal racing. Honestly, I prefer autocross and amateur race tracks, but they're just too expensive to drive on. I race on the street because it's cheap. When closed tracks become more affordable, I'll be there." But until legal means become more viable, drivers like Liam will continue to take to the streets.



THE FACE OF NEWS

BY: BRITTANY GREEN

Edward R. Murrow has been widely influential on countless broadcasters. When Murrow was broadcasting from London during World War II, he always introduced the program with his token, "This... is London." Eventually it became "This...is CBS" when he moved to television. To this day, many news shows introduce their shows in this same fashion. This introduction for a television or radio program is not the only way that Murrow has influenced television. According to *Prime Time: The Life of Edward R. Murrow*, "Murrow's career in broadcasting spanned the period from 1935 to 1961..." (Kendrick 26). This span of twenty-six years touched many earth altering events including the Great Depression, World War II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, and the second red scare. Edward R. Murrow made an impact on how news was covered on the radio, helped in the transition of bringing news from radio to television, shaped television documentary news style, and helped television journalism to fill the role of watchdog alongside other methods of journalism.

Edward Murrow went to college at the University of Washington in 1926 and majored in speech (New York Times). According to his obituary in the New York Times, five years after he graduated, he was employed by CBS to be the director of talks and education (New York Times). As a part of his job, Murrow informed groups of how radio could be used in education. "In 1937, Edward R. Murrow was sent by CBS to set up a network of correspondents to report on the gathering storm in Europe" (www.pbs.org). Murrow, alongside his friend Fred Friendly, was the producer of a popular radio news show called *Hear It Now*. The radio show was moved to television in 1951, and was renamed *See It Now* according to *See It Now Confronts McCarthyism* (29). *See It Now* was awarded four Emmy awards, and won a 1952 Peabody Award.

Murrow had a great effect on radio on an international level. He helped to create feelings of camaraderie between the people of Great Britain and the people of the United States through his "people

to people” programs across the Atlantic Ocean (Kendrick 232). These broadcasts helped to win over the American public when the United States joined World War II. According to Foote, “Murrow’s correspondents had a pipeline directly into the living rooms of the American people, and during the uncertainties of wartime, the nation hung on every word” (Foote 1). The British were very grateful for his work in broadcasting the war, and the Queen made him an honorary Knight Commander of the British Empire (Kendrick 512). In his obituary in London, it stated, “He saw our plight and he shared it with us—staying in London through the most devastating of raids. And he remained a friend of Britain in the difficult post-war years” (New York Times). This shows the great impact that he made with radio in both the United States and Great Britain.

Murrow also had a huge part of bringing the news to television. When television started off, Murrow expressed many doubts about whether the new medium was suitable for broadcasting the news. His first concern was that in radio, one person acted as reporter, writer, producer, and broadcaster, but in television, these roles were often split up (Kendrick 318). He recognized many of the problems and limitations with television, and alongside Fred Friendly, he helped make the news as effective and ethical on television as he had made it on the radio. The program that he started on television was considered very prestigious. According to Murrow’s obituary in the New York Times, “On television, his series of news documentaries, *See It Now*, on the Columbia Broadcasting System from 1951 to 1958, set the standard for all television documentaries on all networks.” Murrow made television a respected medium, and set the standard for producing television news extremely high. According to Kendrick, a “figure in the television industry once told him that ‘for the first time on TV, what I heard was as important as what I saw’” (Kendrick 341). This shows how other people working in the industry had immense respect for Murrow. Murrow was looked up to by the members of the industry, regardless of which network they worked for. This would also be seen in the way that television reporters would emulate his style for years to come. From that point on, news shows would be held to a standard of better quality journalism.

Edward Murrow shaped the television documentary news style. According to www.pbs.org, “*See It Now* consistently broke new ground in the burgeoning field of television journalism” (www.pbs.org). “[*See It Now*] was the first program to shoot its own film for its own specific purposes, rather than use film already shot for the newsreels and for daily news programs, or taken from the archives” (Kendrick 339). Before *See It Now*, a similar program would use primarily stock footage for any video. *See It Now*

found the news from around the world and brought it to the television sets of people all across the United States. Families could see world events happening before their very eyes for the first time, right in their living rooms.

See It Now employed five full-time camera crews and they went anywhere in the world, according to the New York Times. Having their own traveling camera crews allowed them to have footage of news that was unique to their program, which set it apart from other news shows. The filming of original footage for the show created the expectation that news shows use their own footage, rather than use stock footage.

Murrow acted as a watchdog on society, and was one of the first television personalities to fill that role. Murrow began doing this while he was still in radio as he reported on events in Great Britain in World War II. Murrow frequently broadcast messages in support of the war. In Prime Time, Murrow is quoted as saying; “when this war is all over the entire world will be dominated either from Berlin or from Washington. We must see to it that we will win” (241). This may be seen as editorializing, as he was spreading his personal opinions about what he thought the country should do. He may also be seen as a watchdog because he was directing attention to areas that he felt the government was not paying enough attention to. Murrow felt that “many Americans were still viewing the conflict as a spectacle and were ‘spectators with an inadequate understanding of our own responsibility’” (241). He wanted the United States to help the Europeans in their struggle, and he felt as though it was a national responsibility to assist. He was acting as a watchdog by criticizing the United States Government’s lack of contribution in the war.

Murrow also freely criticized the actions of the United States Government in the Korean War. During the Korean War, Murrow said in one broadcast, “So far as this reporter is concerned, he doesn’t see where or when this conflict will end. For this is not an isolated war...” (qtd. in Kendrick 327). In this instance, Murrow was observing the ineffectiveness of the U.S. government in the Korean War. He felt as though the government had less responsibility in Korea than they had in Europe in World War II. This was also an act of editorializing, because he was expressing his opinions on the war. The fact that he drew the attention of the people to this problem and raised the people’s awareness, meant he was fulfilling the watchdog role.

Most famously, Murrow helped to draw national attention to the communist witch hunts initiated

by Senator Joseph McCarthy. On March 9, 1954, Morrow's program, "composed almost entirely of McCarthy's own words and pictures, was a damning portrait of a fanatic" (www.pbs.org). The program significantly contributed to the downfall of McCarthy's political career. The *See It Now* report on Senator Joseph McCarthy "may have had the very discernable 'effect' of shifting the topic of debate about McCarthyism from the question of ends to the question of means" (Rosteck 181). In Thomas Rosteck's book *See It Now Confronts McCarthyism*, he argues that Murrow did not single-handedly bring down McCarthyism, but that he brought it to the attention of more people by showing the report on television. It also opened the debate about McCarthyism to include some middle ground (Rosteck 181). Before the program, Americans were afraid that if they disagreed with McCarthy, their friends and neighbors would also accuse them of being Communists. The opening up of this discussion allowed McCarthy to be disagreed with. This shows how *See It Now* played watchdog, by bringing more attention to an issue within the government. It, to say the least, assisted in bringing down a man who was clearly mad with power.

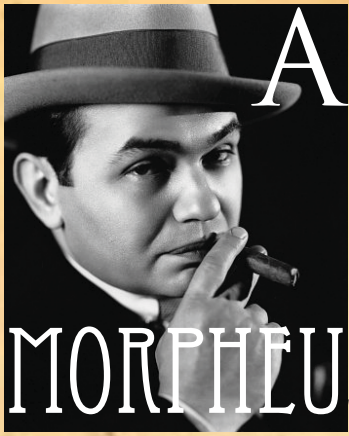
Murrow had proven himself to be a powerful public figure, capable of influencing the public. His influence over the public allowed him to use television to keep government powers in check. "More than anything else...[the McCarthy program] demonstrated the unique position Murrow held, not only as the leading practitioner of the broadcasting art, but through it as a public figure in his own right...who could challenge the man the President himself.." (Kendrick 35). As a figure considered by some to be nearly as powerful as the president, Murrow could easily be a part of the checks and balances system that our government needs through the media.

Murrow's work impacted how news was covered on the radio, helped in the transition of news from radio to television, shaped television documentary news style, and was a watchdog for society during some of America's most trying times. His work would influence television and radio for years after his death.

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LITERARY



AKIRA KUROSAWA AND POSTWAR JAPAN

MORPHEUS '10

BY: NATTY BERRY

World War Two is a critical event in the history of humanity, involving to exceptional degrees every significant power in the world. For the first and last time in human history, nuclear weapons were detonated in warfare by the United States Air Force against the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Japan surrendered six days after the destruction of Nagasaki, and the Japanese islands came under control of the American military. (Stokesbury) Allied victory marked the end of imperial and isolationist Japan, and marked the beginning of a new Japan with a somewhat symbiotic relationship with the West. Although Japanese business jumped at the prospect of a Western market, there were many Japanese people who resented the death of the old ways. This conflict of ideology was pervasive in Japanese culture, mixed with a miasmic depression common in the post war world. Postwar director Akira Kurosawa's bleakly realistic movies such as *Stray Dog*, *Rashomon*, and *Seven Samurai*, portrayed desperate and despondent men and women forced to come to terms with the issues postwar Japanese people were all too familiar with.

Akira Kurosawa was born in 1910, the eighth and final child of Isamu and Shima Kurosawa. Isamu, Akira's father, was the director of a junior high school under the jurisdiction of the Japanese Military. Although he worked for the conservative military, Isamu loved western culture and cinema, which exposed Akira to film at a young age. (Chaio) In 1923 Akira witnessed the Great Kanto Earthquake, a magnitude 7.9 that destroyed Tokyo and killed 100,000 of its residents. As Akira and his older brother Heigo walked through the devastated city, Heigo told Akira to look at the piled corpses in the streets in order to overcome his fear of death. This taught Akira to look at the frightening and disturbing head-on, a method of thought evident in his bleak, realistic films.

In 1936, Akira Kurosawa began his film career as an assistant director to Japanese filmmaker Kajiro Yamamoto. While he was assistant to Yamamoto, Japanese troops invaded China, the Imperial government signed an alliance with the fascist states in Europe, and the Japanese Armed Forces attacked the

United States Naval base at Pearl Harbor, in December of 1941. (Stokesbury) Japan had thrust itself into a war of conquest against powers it could not reasonably defeat, in order to gain an empire it could never hold on to. (Stokesbury) Japan had to fully mobilize for the war effort, and Japanese cinema, along with cinema the world over, had to mobilize too. Akira Kurosawa was not deemed physically suitable for enlistment, so he was to serve his country directing heavily propagandistic films under close supervision from the Japanese government.

“There was no freedom of expression during the war. All I could do was write [propaganda], without having any real outlet for my own feelings.” (Kurosawa.) During World War II Kurosawa directed three films, *Sanshiro Sugata* (1943), *The Most Beautiful* (1944), and *Sanshiro Sugata Part II* (1945). All were very much in line with the Imperial government’s war aims. *The Most Beautiful* depicts female Japanese factory workers coming together to meet the demands of wartime production, and *Sanshiro Sugata Part II* depicts Japanese martial artists blithely defeating overconfident American boxers. These patriotic films and thinly veiled allegories are to be found among wartime movies of all nations, the Western democracies included along with the totalitarian states. By the release of *Sanshiro Sugata Part II* Imperial Japan was on the ropes, Iwo Jima had fallen to the United States Marine Corps, and the Japanese defense of Okinawa seemed ever more hopeless. Films like this were meant to inspire a nation that was losing confidence in its ability to defeat an invading foreign culture. Despite the proliferation of propaganda, nuclear bombs decided the question of Japan’s role in World War Two beyond any doubt. (Stokesbury)

In many ways, Akira Kurosawa was the perfect man to capture the postwar sentiment of Japan. His life had been filled with the same kind of personal loss many Japanese people had to deal with in the years following the war, all three of Kurosawa’s brothers having died from various circumstances before the young director’s twenty-fourth birthday. His experience with personal loss allowed him to convey realistic attitudes toward death on the big screen. He was involved on a cinematic level with the war effort, and therefore he experienced defeat in a palpable way, allowing him to communicate the emotions of the defeated soldier and the losing side to an audience trying to come to terms with the Allied victory. Although he was not necessarily in favor of Japan’s involvement in the war, Kurosawa, like the vast majority of Japanese civilians, was horrified at the destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and was able to confess on film the feelings of terror and helplessness a nuclear attack imbued. (Chaio)

Kurosawa’s first few postwar films convey a sense of loss, and helpless anger, in the style of the

American noir film. Noir, as a genre, was first popularized by American B-grade studios before the war, and enjoyed a surge of popularity in the years following the Second World War, both in America and worldwide. A style “adapted to reflect the postwar ambience of anxiety, pessimism, and suspicion,” (Miyamoto) noir was incredibly pervasive in the period following the war, as it served as an outlet to express the fears of the survivors of World War II. It would seem unsurprising that Kurosawa would, in this atmosphere, produce his own noir films, and indeed he did, with such cinematic masterpieces as *Drunken Angel* (1948), and *Stray Dog* (1949). These films are certainly prime examples of the noir genre, filmed in dirty and oppressive urban jungles, starring reasonably moral protagonists in a morally ambiguous world. But what is most truly remarkable about Kurosawa’s noir films is that there is almost no chance that these movies could have been influenced by foreign noir films. During the war, American movies were banned in Japan, and even after the war the American occupiers did not allow the importation of foreign films with themes considered dark or unproductive. (Miyamoto) That Kurosawa independently generated films that exemplified the noir genre shows how important noir themes were to a post-war people, and how sensitive Kurosawa was to the culture of his day. Kurosawa’s first few postwar films helped to establish his career, but his greatest cinematic accomplishments were yet to come.

The 1950s was considered by most film critics to be the Golden Age of Japanese Cinema. (Kehr) The period following the American occupation was certainly beneficial to Kurosawa, who made the majority of his most critically acclaimed works during this time. (Rotten Tomatoes.com) These movies began straying away from direct portrayals of postwar Japan, and began dealing with themes of defeat and disparity in a setting dear to the heart of Japanese culture: that of the Japanese Civil War, and the age of the Samurai. The Samurai and their Bushido code had been perverted by the Imperial Military into something that could be easily used for propaganda, something that could justify the apocalyptic casualty count Japan was accruing throughout the course of their war. (Turnbull) Kurosawa was eager to redeem the Samurai in the eyes of the Japanese people, a goal partially motivated by his ancestry in the Samurai caste. (Kemp) This goal was vilified most notably in films such as *The Seven Samurai* (1954), *The Hidden Fortress* (1958), *Yojimbo* (1961), and *Kagemusha* (1980). These films were important, in part because they helped to re-establish the Samurai as respectable cultural heroes, redeeming them in the eyes of the Japanese people, and introducing them to Western audiences.

Bridging the gap between the early noirs and later epics of Kurosawa is the outstanding film

Rashomon (1950). *Rashomon* is arguably the first of Kurosawa's Samurai films, although its story and tone is very reminiscent of a post-modern noir mystery, from the uncertainty and unreliability of events, to the moral bankruptcy of nearly every major character, to the ceaseless rain that dominates the film's frame story. *Rashomon* opens in the pouring rain, on a shot of peasants seeking shelter under the ruined Rashomon Gate, which along with the rest of the town was destroyed by civil war. The dismal shots of the devastated town look unmistakably similar to the photographs of Hiroshima after the bombing, images that were certainly fresh in the mind of Kurosawa and his audience. The story of *Rashomon* would have certainly not passed the censors during the war; no character is fully genuine or to be trusted, including the soldiers and the officials. In the mode of the great realist writers of the 19th century, nothing is as grand as it is made out to be, a great duel turns out to be a pitiful scuffle, an angelic woman turns out to be manipulative and cowardly. The revelation of the dismal truths of life mirror the revelation that had recently transpired in Japanese culture, that their godlike emperor and his invincible army were nothing compared to the harsher realities of mechanization and total war. (Sham)

Rashomon secured Akira Kurosawa's place in cinematic history, receiving high acclaim in Japan, as well as in the west, winning the Golden Lion at the 1951 Venice Film Festival. Said Kurosawa, "Had I not won the prize, I would have been forced to remain silent for a considerable time. Thanks to *Rashomon*, I was able to go on to make *Ikiru*." (Kurosawa) Several of the actors in *Rashomon* would become fixtures of the Kurosawa cannon, most notably Toshiro Mifune, who would star in *Yojimbo* (1960), and Takashi Shimura, who would star in *Ikiru* (1952). Both of these actors would join Kurosawa in 1954 for his greatest film, a film that would inspire dozens of filmmakers and spawn countless adaptations and remakes; *The Seven Samurai*.

The Seven Samurai would be heralded as Akira Kurosawa's greatest accomplishment as a filmmaker and it is a fantastic window into postwar Japanese society. (Prince) The film in many respects serves as an allegory for the defeat of Japan, and in true realist tradition does not over glorify anyone or anything. Set in feudal Japan during the Japanese Civil War, the story focuses on a group of seven masterless Samurai who are hired to defend a village from bandits. The story is simple enough, but the movie lasts three hours, giving the viewer a sense of experiencing a grueling military campaign, and at the end, despite the victory of the Samurai over the bandits, the viewer is left feeling hollow. Entire books have been written analyzing *The Seven Samurai*, but for brevity's sake this paper will touch on only a few essential points.

Critical to the story of *The Seven Samurai* is an understanding of the class structure. Samurai who had no leader to serve wandered the land as Ronin, or masterless Samurai, having no obligation to anyone, least of all the farmers and peasants. (Turnbull) That the Samurai volunteer to help the desperate villagers with only rice to serve as compensation shows strong morals and a strong sense of duty on the part of the Samurai. This is a far cry from the suicidal Kamikaze warriors employed by Imperial Japan, and this is certainly Kurosawa's way of trying to steer Japanese culture back to a sensible and honorable root. Similarly, a conversation between two of the Samurai details how, after an unsuccessful battle, the Samurai managed to hide and evade capture or death. Retreat and surrender were unacceptable in the Imperial Japanese Military, to which the Kamikaze doctrine and the mass suicide on Okinawa attest. (Stokesbury) *The Seven Samurai* however, goes out of its way to depict Samurai as pragmatists. Although their move to defend the villagers is dangerous and costly, they do not throw their lives away for abstract concepts of nationalism of Bushido. This directly undermined the attitude of the hardliners of the old Imperial Japan; the message that survival was noble and acceptable was welcomed by the postwar audience. (Kemp)

Other allegories for the Second World War exist in *The Seven Samurai* as well. At the film's end, only three of the original seven Samurai survive, although they are successful in the defense of the village. The young Samurai Katsushiro expresses joy at their victory, but the older Samurai Kambei replies, "In the end, we've lost this battle too... the victory belongs to those peasants, not to us." (Silver) The Samurai Kambei expresses the feelings of many veterans on both sides of World War Two; although peace was achieved, the toll it took on those who fought was too great. Soldiers who lost friends and loved ones in war can hardly enjoy a victory the way non-combatants can. Indeed, the struggle of the seven Samurai mirrors that of the Imperial Japanese soldier in the latter half of the war, a desperate battle to stop invaders from bringing total war to the civilians. In large part, the Imperial Military succeeded in protecting the people of Japan—from a ground war at any rate—but it could hardly be said that victory belonged to the armies of Japan. (Stokesbury)

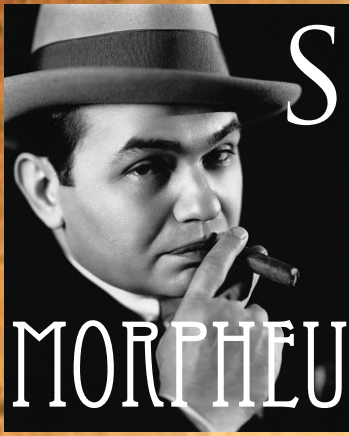
War, to some degree, did also come to the main islands of Japan, with the strategic conventional, incendiary, and finally nuclear bombing of Japan. The bombings haunted and infuriated Kurosawa and the people of Japan in general for years to come. (Prince) *The Seven Samurai* is one of the first of Kurosawa's films to deal with the bombings, represented in this film by the three muskets in the possession of the bandits. During the Japanese Civil War, various warlords imported from Portugal fuse-lit muskets called

Arquebuses, which although they were obsolete in Europe were effective in Japan by virtue of being the only firearms available. The bandits in *The Seven Samurai* use the Arquebus to great effect, and every one of the seven Samurai who dies in the film dies at the hands of a gun. This has incredible allegorical significance, showing Japanese pride and skill and tradition carelessly cut down by remorseless Western technology. The exact thing happens again throughout Kurosawa's cannon, in *Yojimbo* (1961), in *Dersu Uzula* (1975), and in *Kagemusha* (1980) to name only three instances. The death of noble Samurai at the hands of modern western technology speaks to the evolution of the world from a Japanese point of view, as traditional Japanese practices give way to cold Western pragmatism.

Akira Kurosawa was certainly a visionary director; his films spoke to the past, to the present, and to the future all at once. In his period pieces like *Seven Samurai* or *Kagemusha*, even Westerners get a sense of Japan's cultural history. Kurosawa was able through allegory to comment on the times in which his movies were made, regardless of the eras in which his movies were set, and he inspired and cautioned his audiences. Kurosawa's genius behind the camera further inspired generations of filmmakers, even Western directors such as Steven Spielberg, Martin Scorsese, George Lucas, and Francis Ford Coppola. (Prince) To a post-war Western world trying desperately to understand its former enemy Japan, Kurosawa's films provided invaluable insights into a people who had purposefully shrouded themselves in mystery. To the defeated Japanese, his films simultaneously bolstered pride for the mainstays of Japanese culture, as well as provided criticism and caution for the excesses and short sightedness that brought Japan into ruin during the Second World War. "I believe that film is one of the best ways to help foreign countries understand Japan," Kurosawa said, shortly after the release of *Kagemusha*. (Kurosawa) If one accept that notion, then the work of Akira Kurosawa is simply invaluable to the study of Japan during and after World War II.

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SNIPING NAZIS AND LIBERATING PRISONERS

BY: MATT ECHELBERY

Imagine being in a city blanketed in smoke, the buildings and streets nothing but ruins from all of the bombs that have rained down upon them. You are lying in a field full of dead soldiers, hiding from an enemy platoon making their way through the field to collect ammo and supplies from your lifeless friends. To make matters worse, a sniper is inside one of the ruined buildings, hunting you. You look for him, but there are too many windows—too many places to hide—and the platoon is closing in on you. What do you do? War movies are great at setting up intense situations such as this while also retelling history in diverse and entertaining ways. *Enemy at the Gates* (2001) and *The Great Raid* (2005) are two war movies that use characters and intense situations rather than violence and major battle sequences to portray true events during World War II. However, there are several important aspects to examine when watching each movie, such as the overall style, plot devices, the sound, and, most notably, the characters.

Enemy at the Gates depicts the major events during three months of the Battle of Stalingrad in the fall of 1942. It focuses on the efforts of the Russian resistance as German forces overtake the city, the last stand for Eastern Europe. The main character is Vassili Zaitsev (Jude Law), a Red Army soldier who would become a sniper that USSR propaganda dramatized as a hero. In terms of the film's overall style, it uses tension rather than action to drive the story forward. There are several scenes where Zaitsev either looks for targets to snipe out or is under the threat of being sniped himself, and the buildup of waiting for the shot often becomes very suspenseful. Also, the movie has a more personal touch to it than most war movies; it persuades the audience to care for the lives of the characters during their fight to save Stalingrad. To aid in the movie's style were several point-of-view shots, in which the audience sees only what a specific character is seeing. This is used most often when Zaitsev is looking through the scope of his sniper rifle to line up a shot. To give the movie a very bleak and dirty atmosphere, a large amount of smoke is used throughout the movie, transforming the sky into an endless black sea. Also, natural lighting

seems to be used for outside sequences, while very dim lighting is used when characters are inside buildings, the latter of which creates a sense of isolation and despair. The use of smoke and the lighting setup both effectively complement the low morale of the main characters fighting for the Red Army.

At the beginning of the film, there is a major battle scene when Zaitsev first enters the city with a plethora of other soldiers. It is deafening, violent, and very graphic, firmly grasping the audience's attention and showing the astonishing power of the Nazi army and the extent of Stalingrad's crisis. Unlike the vast majority of war movies, this battle is the only major action sequence of the film. The remainder of *Enemy at the Gates* utilizes other plot devices to keep it interesting. For example, it gradually introduces the other main characters, including: Commisar Danilov (Ralph Fiennes), Zaitsev's comrade and friend; Tania Chernova (Rachel Weisz), another comrade; and Major König (Ed Harris), a German sharp shooter. Another device is all of the short scenes in which snipers are at a standoff amid all the ruins of buildings, piles of rubble and bodies, and factory complexes; they build the suspense of who will be spotted and killed first.

Another World War II film, titled *The Great Raid*, recounts the true story of the most successful rescue mission in U.S. military history when over 500 POWs (Prisoners of War) were liberated from a Japanese labor camp in 1945. The plot shifts back and forth between the soldiers of the rescue operation as they plan and execute it, the POWs, and the Pilipino resistance. Commenting on its overall style, it is done in the approach of older war movies like *The Bridge on the River Kwai* (1957) and *The Longest Day* (1962), due in part to its use of a camera filter to make the film look older and its primary use of a stationary camera. Other factors that contribute to the overall style are the short scenes and quick shots, as the movie often shows several characters in different locations and the simultaneous action that occurs. Also, the movie aims to produce a more natural atmosphere, indicated by natural lighting, as the sunlight often creates shadows and glares on characters. Furthermore, there are numerous scenes showing the beauty of the Philippine wilderness as well as the inner-city section of Manila (the capital city of the Philippines). Unlike *Enemy at the Gates*, this movie displays a natural, undisturbed beauty that has not been physically affected by the war, creating an entirely different atmosphere.

In terms of plot devices, *The Great Raid* opens with a brief historical background, containing black-and-white, realistic-looking news footage that looks like it came from the World War II era. This tries to put the movie into its historical context and aids the audience in better understanding the plot, but if the

viewer does not have prior knowledge of the geography of the Philippines before seeing the movie, he or she may be confused throughout, as there is no full explanation of the multiple settings in which the movie takes place. Also, voiceover narration is featured over the course of it that, in a sense, analyzes and reflects on this major event in American history. Other than that, the movie contains several scenes of irrelevant dialogue, so it tends to switch quickly between the storylines in order to prevent itself from dragging out.

Instead of one plotline and some subplots, *The Great Raid* focuses on three stories: the POWs and their fight for survival, the rescue operation of the POWs by Army rangers, and the Pilipino resistance. The problem with this structure was that the movie, at times, became frustrating to follow and some questions and loose ends were not resolved. The movie may have been better served if it did not try to cover so much material in only a two hour time span. On the other hand, *Enemy at the Gates* featured several subplots, the most important being the propaganda tactics used by Danilov to build up Russian morale for Zaitsev as well as for the resistance effort. Another subplot was the development of a love triangle amongst the two comrades when a female officer, Tania, joins the cause. There is also an implied separation between the higher and lower ranks of soldiers to symbolize communism. All of this works well because these sort of “cross plots” are edited together very coherently and mesh well with the overarching theme.

The sounds of both movies are mostly what you might expect, alternating between quiet background noise during dialogue scenes and loud during any fighting. Bombs, planes, and gunfire are often heard in the background of each, as well as an orchestra playing music to capture the emotion of a scene from time to time. In *The Great Raid*, background music is seldom noticeable, as it rarely plays and for the moments that it does, it is usually soft. An orchestra plays dramatic pieces for execution scenes as well as the actual raid, but otherwise the music has a more Asian feel to complement the film’s setting. The orchestrated music of *Enemy at the Gates* is more distinguished and comes more often, but the sounds of battle—all the bombs and gunfire—are more pronounced than any scenes with music. All the same, it plays well into the emotions of scenes and the depressing environment that the movie takes place in.

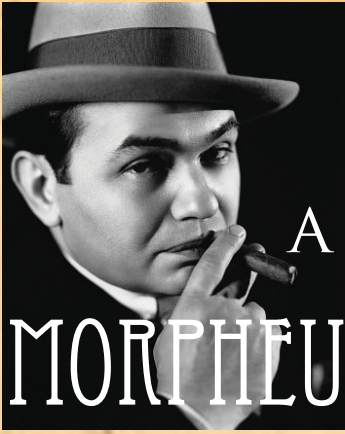
Both movies are more character driven compared to most war movies released around the same time. In *The Great Raid*, the large ensemble cast and constant scene changes do not allow for much empathy toward any of the characters. In one storyline, Lt. Colonel Mucci (Benjamin Bratt) and Captain

Prince (James Franco) are in charge of the rescue operation, yet the movie never really gives any insight into either of the two or any of the other rangers as they plan out the mission. In the second storyline, Margaret Utinsky (Connie Nielson) is an American civilian working with the Pilipino resistance in Manila to smuggle food and medical supplies to the POWs. However, just as her story reaches its climax and potential for the most conflict, she is not seen again until the end of the movie. The only characters left to really care about are the prisoners, in a camp called Cabanatuan on the Philippine island of Luzon. The majority of the time they are on screen is when the Japanese guards are abusing or executing them, which distracts from understanding what they are going through as they are starved, mistreated, and deprived of much-needed medicine. On the other hand, there are only a few main characters in *Enemy at the Gates* and much time is devoted to understanding each of them. The actors look like they actually belong in this time period, none of them look out of place or too fake. The carefully-written dialogue gives the harsh reality of war a more human perspective. Also, the overall acting is very convincing, whereas the acting of *The Great Raid* tends to be stiff and more military-like.

On a more personal level, *Enemy at the Gates* captivated my interest and produced an emotional response more successfully than *The Great Raid*. When Zaitsev realizes he is being hunted by Major König, the duel between the two snipers becomes an interesting game of two wolves hunting each other, and the varying tactics used by each man to find the other showed a great contrast between the two. The final showdown at the conclusion of the movie was made all the more satisfying due to all the earlier scenes where one would almost kill the other. The movie had a unique style, the characters had depth, and the subplots were carefully woven in. *The Great Raid* had its moments, but saved most of the conflict for the end of the movie when the large battle finally took place, so by that time I simply did not care about the movie since the mission was obviously successful.

After watching the movies *Enemy at the Gates* and *The Great Raid*, I certify that the former is the superior of the two. Though one movie focuses on the Eastern Front (former Soviet Union) while the other takes place in the Pacific Front (Philippines), the difference of setting was not an issue as each movie was evaluated using the same criteria: the style, specifically camera, editing, and lighting techniques; plot devices, or how the story was propelled forward; the characters and acting; the subplots; and the sound and music. The overall style of *Enemy at the Gates* successfully establishes the war-torn, harsh conditions of Stalingrad, while the latter takes place in too many locations to keep up with. The use of point-of-

view shots makes *Enemy at the Gates* stand out from other war films, and the acting works well with the gloomy set design and sounds. It has a seemingly natural ability to build up tension and show the depth of the main characters that it centers on, as well as their individual motivations for their actions. *Enemy at the Gates* presents a theme of finding hope when there is no hope. It is memorable, moving, and without a doubt one of the best war movies I have ever seen.



FROM ABIGAIL TO MCCARTHY: A NEW HISTORICAL APPROACH TO THE CRUCIBLE

BY: RAY OUELLETTE

One of American's most acclaimed playwrights is Arthur Miller. For more than 70 years, Arthur Miller commented on the social structure of post World War II America in more than 20 plays including *All My Sons* (1947), *Death of a Salesman* (1949), *A View From the Bridge* (1955) and *A Memory of Two Mondays* (1955) ("The Works"). One of Arthur Miller's most celebrated works is his 1953 play, *The Crucible*. Set in 1692, *The Crucible* depicts how the Salem Witch Trials affected the innocent citizens of Salem, Massachusetts ("Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*"). Acclaimed for both its historical approach and its social commentary on America's structure in the 1950's, *The Crucible* won the 1953 Tony Award for "Best Play" ("Award"). The play was twice adapted for film in 1957 and 1996, and the latter film adaption earned Arthur Miller an Academy Award nomination for Best Screenplay Based on Previously Produced Material (Miller "Why").

Miller uses *The Crucible* to make commentary on the social structure of America in the wake of WWII ("Arthur Miller – McCarthyism"). According to Arthur Miller, society must learn and accept the structure of America, and he, as the artist, will present it to them ("Arthur Miller-McCarthyism"). In order to understand how Arthur Miller viewed the social structure of the United States of America in *The Crucible*, this study will use the literary technique of New Historicism by analyzing what was occurring in the play's time period (1692) and what was occurring when this play was written (1953).

The Crucible takes place in 1692, in Salem, Massachusetts, during the Salem Witch Trials. The characters have the same names of actual people involved in the Salem Witch Trials. This, however, does not mean that *The Crucible* is completely historically accurate. Miller was quoted as saying "This play is not history in the sense in which the word is used by the academic historian. Dramatic purposes have sometimes required many characters to be [altered]...However, I believe that the reader will discover here the essential nature of one of the strangest and most awful chapters in human history" ("Arthur Miller's").

Even though the play may not be historically accurate, Miller still believes that, based on the info he has gathered, he has offered an effective portrayal of The Salem Witch Trials.

The Salem Witch Trials began in 1692, when Betty and Abigail Williams, the daughter and niece of the Reverend Samuel Parris began having fits and complained of being pinched and pricked with pins while screaming. Other girls throughout Salem were complaining of having the same fits, and they began accusing women within Salem of afflicting them. The courts made their first three arrests on the grounds of witchcraft based on the girls' accusations: Sarah Good, Sarah Osbourne, and Tituba ("Salem"). The courts began warranting more arrests based on numerous accusations. When Martha Corey and Rebecca Nurse were accused of witchcraft, there was skepticism within the courts because both women were well-known members of the church in Salem Town. When Elizabeth Proctor was accused of witchcraft, her husband, John Proctor, went to the courts and protested, an act which caused John Proctor to be accused and arrested on the grounds of witchcraft, the first man to be accused of being a witch. The trials went from January 16, 1692, to October 29, 1692, when the courts decided that spectral evidence was no longer accepted in the trials and decided to prohibit further arrests based on the accusation of witchcraft ("Chronology"). During the trials, 140 people were accused, and 19 were hanged ("Salem").

To fully understand how the story of *The Crucible* relates to America in the 1950s, one must evaluate what was happening in America in 1953. The United States of America was dealing with McCarthyism, or the Second Red Scare. McCarthyism is a term that describes the extreme anti-communist stance America was taking from the late 1940s to the late 1950s. ("McCarthyism"). Communism is a political idea created by the German philosopher, Karl Marx. Communists believe that the government should be a stateless and a classless society controlled by the people. Government should be completely democratic, and all individuals from society should be able to participate in the government's decision-making ("Communism").

McCarthyism in America began after World War II when the United States of America and the Soviet Union began feuding with each other. After Germany surrendered, Winston Churchill, Harry Truman, and Joseph Stalin met at Yalta in 1945, at the Potsdam Conference, to decide how to organize Europe after World War II. The main issue was that the United States of America and Great Britain wanted Eastern Europe to be controlled by free elections and democratic governments, but Stalin wanted Eastern Europe to be under Soviet influence and ruled by a Communist regime, especially Poland. At the end of the con-

ference, Stalin, Churchill, and Truman came to a decision. If the Soviet Union could gain Poland, then they agreed to hold free elections in Poland despite their Communist regime (Wertheim 213). In 1947, the Soviet Union rigged the elections in Poland: they persecuted the political leaders who opposed Communism, rigged the votes, and falsified the results. The 1947 Elections led to Poland declaring themselves a Communist country in 1949. This would eventually lead to a Cold War between them and the United States of America ("What").

With America entering war against a Communist superpower, the American people were in great fear of a Soviet attack. The Cold War was called the "cold" war because neither side attacked using tanks and brute force. The Cold War was a nuclear arms race between both superpowers ("What"). The nuclear threat started when the United States of America released a nuclear bomb in Japan, attacking Hiroshima in 1945. The Soviet Union protested America's use of nuclear weapons and began working on their rival nuclear program. In 1949, America found out that the Soviet Union's nuclear program was just as powerful as America's and they were creating a nuclear bomb as well. Both countries were in a "nuclear stalemate," and each superpower was afraid to make the first move ("The Atomic").

As the Soviet Union remained a threat overseas, Communist political parties gained momentum in America. In the mid 1940s, the Communist Party of the United States (CPUSA) had approximately 75,000 members. Also, in the mid 1940s there were reports of Russian espionage on American soil. These spies were hired to find American military plans and report back to Russia ("Communism"). For example, in 1950, Julius and Ethel Rosenberg were caught stealing the plans for the atomic bomb for the Soviets. Also, conservative politicians believed that liberal movements such as women's rights and child labor laws were also because of Communist influence ("The Trial").

As the Communist threat increased in America, it also intensified overseas. Not only did the United States have to deal with the Soviet Union, but China also adopted Communism. China announced themselves a Communist country in 1949. This sparked the Korean War in 1950, when Communist China and Communist North Korea went to war against the United States of America, the United Nations, and South Korea ("Rise"). With the threat of communism impacting America both internally and externally, Wisconsin Senator Joseph McCarthy rose to power ("Joseph McCarthy").

The McCarthy period began on February 9, 1950. McCarthy made a speech in Wheeling, West Vir-

ginia, in which he said: "I have here in my hand a list of 205 – a list of names that were made known to the Secretary of State as being members of the Communist Party and who nevertheless are still working and shaping policy in the State Department" ("McCarthy: Speech") After this speech, McCarthy worked alongside the Un-American Activities Committee and the President of the United States to fight the Communist "epidemic" in America, investigating American citizens and using heavy military surveillance ("Joseph McCarthy").

During the McCarthy period, the President of the United States changed twice. Both Presidents were supporters of McCarthyism. The first example of this is in 1947 when President Truman passed the Executive Order 9835, which called for loyalty reviews of federal employees. These reviews were not only to protect the American government from suspected Communist espionage but also for Truman, a Democratic President, to get favor from the majority of Congress, who were predominantly Republican and Anti-Communist. When Dwight D. Eisenhower took office, he not only continued Truman's Order but strengthened it by decreasing the chance for appeals from fired employees ("McCarthyism").

The Executive Order of 9835 gave power to the Federal Bureau of Investigation and to the F.B.I. director, J. Edgar Hoover. The F.B.I. was in charge of holding the loyalty reviews for government officials. The identities of those providing information to the Federal Bureau was kept confidential so those that were subject to loyalty reviews didn't know who suspected them or what evidence was brought up against them. From 1951- 1955, the F.B.I. launched the "Responsibilities Program," which allowed the F.B.I. to investigate the Communist affiliation of teachers, lawyers, and others. They were also active in a number of illegal activities to gain their information: such as burglary, opening mail, and illegal wiretap ("J. Edgar Hoover").

Working alongside the FBI was the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), the most active government committee to be involved in Communist investigations. The Committee was formed in 1938 to investigate various activities that were considered "threatening" towards American security ("Communism"). In 1947, the Committee began to investigate screenwriters, directors, and other members of the Hollywood film industry, on their involvement with the Communist Party. These investigations caused the HUAC to create Hollywood Blacklists, lists of entertainment professionals who would be denied employment in their field because of their suspected political beliefs or associations. These lists would cause over 300 American actors, authors, and directors to be denied work in the USA. Victims

included American composer Leonard Bernstein, silent film star Charlie Chaplin, and playwright Arthur Miller (“The Hollywood”).

Arthur Miller was arrested in 1957, four years after he wrote *The Crucible*. Miller was subpoenaed in 1956 by the HUAC when he attempted to renew his passport in order for him to attend the London opening of *The Crucible*. At the 1957 hearing, Miller asked the committee to not ask him to name names, which the committee agreed to. During the trial, Miller wanted the HUAC to understand that, even though he had very “left-wing” political attitudes, he was not a Communist, and he never took membership to a Communist Party. The HUAC then asked Miller for the names of associates who had partaken in similar political activities as Miller, and he refused to reveal their identities. The judge found Miller guilty of contempt of Congress, and he was fined \$500 and sentenced to 30 days of jail. He was also blacklisted and was not allowed a passport to leave America. In 1958, his conviction was overturned, and it was ruled that Miller was misled by the judge at the proceedings (“Arthur Miller: His”).

The main reason why Miller wrote *The Crucible* was because he believed that the threat of communism was causing the American government to infringe on his artistic liberties. In an article from *The New Yorker* entitled: “Why I Wrote ‘The Crucible,’” Arthur Miller, himself, states: “‘The Crucible’ was an act of desperation... our sensitivity to this onslaught on our liberties was passing from us.” Miller believed that in the 1950s, art was no longer used to entertain the masses, but rather to promote patriotism to bash the Communist threat. Because of this conviction, Miller wanted to portray the element of insanity and paranoia that McCarthyism created and incorporate the hysteria to the stage (Miller “Why”).

So why did Miller use the Salem Witch trials to symbolize McCarthyism? Miller visited Salem, Massachusetts, in 1952. In an abandoned courthouse he found transcripts of the witchcraft trials, and a report written by the Reverend Samuel Parris, who was a chief investigator for the witch hunt (Miller “Why”). A section of the report, mentioned Abigail’s behavior during the examination of the Salem villager, Elizabeth Proctor:

When Abigail’s hand came near, it opened, whereas it was made up into a fist before, and came down exceeding lightly as it drew near to said Procter, and at length, with open and extended fingers, touched Procter’s hood very lightly. Immediately Abigail cried out her fingers, her fingers, her fingers burned (Miller “Why”).

After Miller read this excerpt, he knew that a play was possible (Miller “Why”).

He decided to study the 1867, Charles W. Upham, book entitled: Salem Witchcraft with an Account of Salem Village and a History of Opinions on Witchcraft and Kindred Subjects. Miller began to research many characters whom would be incorporated in his tragedy including: Reverend Parris, Reverend Hale, John Putnam, Rebecca Nurse, and many others (Brandon).

Miller took a special interest in the relationship between John Proctor, Elizabeth Proctor and Abigail. Miller read that Elizabeth Proctor was Abigail’s mistress until Elizabeth fired Abigail. Miller believed that the reason why Elizabeth Proctor fired Abigail was because of her husband, John Proctor (Miller “Why”). The conflict between the two women causes the main conflict in the play and puts the protagonist, John Proctor, in the middle. For example, in the second Act of The Crucible when Proctor and Elizabeth were sitting in their house, the mere mention of Abigail causes the couple to begin fighting:

Elizabeth: You were alone with her?

Proctor: For a moment alone, aye.

...

Elizabeth: Do as you wish, then.

Proctor: Woman, I’ll not have your suspicion any more.

...

Elizabeth: Then let you not earn it.

Proctor: You doubt me yet?

Elizabeth: John if it were not Abigail that you might go to hurt, would you falter

now? I think not (Miller “The Crucible” 387)

Serving as the main protester to the witch trials, Proctor overturns his personal guilt of sleeping with Abigail Williams, and stands against the courts, even if it means risking his own life. Arthur Miller found himself in the character of John Proctor, and began writing the play around the story’s protagonist (McGill 259).

Because Miller could identify with one of his characters, he saw the Salem Witch Trials of 1692 as an allegory to the 1950s epidemic of McCarthyism. In both the Salem Witch Trials and McCarthyism, victims are helpless in a closed logical system. Defendants are powerless, court systems jump to irrational decisions, people are in danger if they question the court's methods, and punishment is given to those who insist on being innocent (Levin 539).

Characters in the play serve as symbols of the court systems. Abigail Williams and the rest of the afflicted girls symbolize the F.B.I., who used unethical tactics to find evidence against those who were accused of Communism. They also planted evidence in order to arrest those who were convicted, just as the girls made up the entire witchcraft hysteria. For example, in *The Crucible*, the sergeant Cheever tells Proctor why Abigail accuses Elizabeth of being a witch: "He [Parris] goes to save her, and, stuck two inches in the flesh of her belly, he draws a needle out...She testify it were your wife's familiar spirit pushed it in" (Miller "The Crucible" 403). Cheever then finds a poppet in the room and uses it as evidence, but Mary Warren, the servant girl of the Proctors admits that she gave it to Elizabeth and left the needle in the poppet herself.

Reverend Hale, who strongly believed that witchcraft was a serious epidemic, symbolized President Eisenhower. They both had faith that their court systems were upholding the justice of the land. However, they were both deceived in believing that their courts were using honest measures in order to ensure justice. Judge Danforth and the Salem Courts are direct representations of the Congressional Committees. Both use fear and threats in order to receive testimonies from the defendants. Miller admitted that John Proctor symbolized himself, a victim of the McCarthy law system. Little did he know that, when writing about the witch trial of John Proctor, he was also foreshadowing his appearance before the HUAC and his indictment for contempt of Congress (Wertheim 219).

One similarity between McCarthyism and the Salem Witch Trials is the tactics that the courts used. During the Salem Witch Trials, the courts used "spectral evidence" for the first time as proof of guilt. When prosecuting those convicted of witchcraft, the persecutor can state that the convicted had sent out their "familiar spirit" to choke them, tickle them, poison their cattle, control their thoughts, or other various actions. The testimony needed no further verification or proof (Miller "Why"). This relates back to the McCarthy period, as all one had to do was accuse someone else of being a Communist and that person would be arrested and had to go to court. Little to no evidence was needed to convict someone of being a

Communist.

When one was convicted of “spectral evidence,” the only thing the accused could do was admit to having had contact with the Devil. Whether the accused confessed guilty or innocent, the courts already believed that he or she was guilty of witchcraft. The courts thought that there must be some reason why someone would be accused. By denying that there is any reason to be accused, one is implying that mere chance had picked them out as a victim. The belief in chance meant that the civilian did not believe in fate and also did not believe in God, which proved guilt. This argument was used by both court systems in order to prove that the guilty party did not believe in God, or a structure of a government, which gave the courts enough evidence to arrest the accused. (O’Neal 113).

If the accused confesses guilt and gives his or her confession to the courts, the courts would ask for the person’s proof of sincerity in fighting witchcraft in Salem and ask the guilty to name others whom they saw in the Devil’s company (Miller). For example, in *The Crucible*, in order to protect herself from being hanged, Tituba announces that she wants to have faith in God and no longer wants to be controlled by the Devil. She is then asked by Reverend Hale for the names of the women who are also controlled by the Devil:

Tituba: ...I tell him I don’t desire to work for him, sir.

Parris: The Devil?

...

Tituba: Mister Reverend, I do believe somebody else be witchin’ these children.

Hale: Who?

Tituba: I don’t know, sir, but the Devil got him numerous witches.

...

Hale: And you love God Tituba?

Tituba: I love God with all my bein’.

Hale: Open yourself Tituba...and let God’s holy light shine on you...When the Devil

comes to you does he ever come with another person?

...

Tituba: Oh, God, protect Tituba!...There was four...there was four...there was Goody

Good...and Goody Osbourne. (Miller "The Crucible" 380-382)

Since the accused were automatically assumed guilty, and the courts could create evidence to prove guilt, the accused's punishment was mainly determined by how well the guilty worked with the Congressional Committee (Miller "Why").

Another connecting factor between the actuality of McCarthyism and the historical, but fictitious play *The Crucible*, was paranoia. Arthur Miller believed that it was the audience's fascination with the outbreak of paranoia that caused the impact of the play: "I was motivated in some great part by the paralysis that had set in among many liberals who, despite their discomfort with the inquisitors' violations of civil rights, were fearful, and with good reason of being identified as covert Communists if they should protest too strongly (Miller "Why"). During the McCarthy period many innocent civilians believed that the court's tactics were wrong, and that they infringed on civilians' rights. Many of these civilians were Americans who had great influence on society, but were afraid that if they protested too strongly, they would be accused as Communists themselves. This parallels the courts of Salem, as innocent civilians were so worried about being accused of being witches that they refused to speak out against the immoral practices of the courts and the girls.

Arthur Miller stated that the play's main theme is absolute morality (Levin 539). In both the court systems of the 17th Century and 20th Century, pride had gotten in the way of both courts' sense of morality. In both instances, the courts were so keen on showcasing their power and upholding the laws of the land that they no longer paid attention to the individual rights and freedoms of the accused. This caused both court systems to arrest innocent people. Civilians denied the possibility that the courts could be punishing innocent people, and the evidence that stated otherwise was ignored by civilians, who seemed to have so much pride in their court systems that their sense of morality, and right from wrong, was altered ("Communism").

The idea of absolute morality creates an irony within both the play of *The Crucible* and the reality

of McCarthyism. Innocent civilians were looking to the government as examples of morality and justice, and yet they are arresting innocent people (Levin 538). In *The Crucible*, the irony is taken a step further through the character of Reverend John Hale. At the beginning of the play, Hale states that he cannot distinguish between diabolical and merely sinful behavior (Levin 541). He shows this in the second act of *The Crucible* by saying: "...these are new times, sir. There is a misty plot afoot so subtle we should be criminal to cling to old respects...The Devil is alive in Salem, and we dare not quail to follow wherever the accusing finger points!" (Miller "The Crucible" 400). In the end of the play, he is trying to persuade the arrested to confess to being witches in order to avoid execution, claiming: "I come to do the Devil's work. I come to counsel Christians they should belie themselves...for life is God's most precious gift" (Miller "The Crucible" 443-444). As a Reverend, one would expect Hale to be a moral leader, yet he is trying to convince innocent people to lie to the court system and admit their guilt. This example also shows a leader who knows that the court system is corrupt, and even though he is attempting to stop the system as best as he can, he still allows it to continue (Levin 537).

Another example of moral irony in *The Crucible*, is how the courts will not believe that Abigail Williams, who falsely testified to witchcraft at the beginning of the play, falsely denied adultery with John Proctor, and had falsely accused witches throughout the story, would be lying to the courts, but is convinced that John Proctor, who has told the truth about his adultery with Abigail Williams, and has told the truth of his innocence of witchcraft, is a witch. The court's immorality has caused them to go blind to the evidence presented before them of Proctor's innocence (Levin 537). This reflects back to the court systems of the McCarthy period, as many courts were also blind to the fact that many of the convicted were innocent. Miller stated that: "In any play, however trivial, there has to be a still point of moral reference against which to gauge the action. In our lives, in the late nineteen-forties and early nineteen-fifties, no such point existed anymore" (Miller "Why").

Miller believed that the lack of morality did not come from the deliberate cruelty of the courts, but rather from the inability of the courts and the government to take personal responsibility for their actions (Levin 537). This is shown through *The Crucible*. As previously mentioned, leaders of Salem understood that the courts were corrupt and that innocent people were dying, but they still did nothing about it. At the very end of the play, both Reverend Parris and Reverend Hale admit that the court systems are corrupt, yet they still do not accept personal responsibility for their involvement in their corruption.

Miller also comments on the importance of personal integrity. He believes that the only way to be a moral citizen during the McCarthy period is to hold on to one's principles. In *The Crucible*, Elizabeth Proctor says: "Gods most precious gift is not life at any price, but the life of spiritual freedom and moral integrity" (Miller "The Crucible" 448). Many courts believe that men will put their own life before their principles, but Miller believed that life is not worth living if a man does not stand up for what he believes in. Miller respected all men who had chosen to be honest to the courts and admit innocence even if it meant a longer jail sentence, and also refused to give up names of people as affiliates to the Communist Party. Miller's viewpoints of moral integrity are shown in the last scene of *The Crucible*, when John Proctor refuses to give up his principles in order to save his life, claiming: "Because it is my name! Because I cannot have another in my life! Because I lie and sign myself to lie...I have given you my soul; leave me my name" (Miller "The Crucible" 453). In the last scene, the audience sees the triumph of moral integrity in a world of moral uncertainty (Wertheim 216).

According to Judith A. Cerjack's article "Beware the Loss of Conscience: *The Crucible* as Warning for Today," one of the things that Miller fears is that man is losing his sense of self. This loss reflects the conflict of the conscience between justice and evil. In *The Crucible*, Miller created a society that was built on mass hysteria, which causes public terror within all the residents of Salem. Cerjack then states that: "The sin of public terror is that it divests man of conscience, of himself" (Cerjack 55). Miller is using *The Crucible* to show the dangers of coercion and mass hysteria, which creates the battle of justice against evil (Cerjack 55).

As previously mentioned, Miller refused to accuse fellow writers of being Communists, even when the HUAC was demanding him to. Even though Miller was able to protect his sense of self by staying true to his principles, he realized that peoples and groups that give way to mass hysteria lose their individual consciousnesses (Cerjack 55). This was evident in the McCarthy period, and Miller used *The Crucible* to show how it was prevalent in Salem too. In *The Crucible*, the girls accused the nonconformists of witchcraft. In the 1950s the congressional committees accused the nonconformists of communism (Cerjack 57).

Miller was quoted as saying:

It was not only the rise of "McCarthyism" that moved me [to write *The Crucible*] but

something which seemed more weird and mysterious. It was the fact that a political, objective, knowledgeable campaign from the far Right was capable of creating not only a terror, but a new subjective reality, a veritable mystique which was gradually assuming even a holy resonance. The wonder of it all struck me so practical and picayune a cause carried forwards by such manifestly ridiculous men, should be capable of paralyzing thought itself. (Cerjack 56)

Miller shows that his intention for writing *The Crucible* was not only to depict the cruelty of McCarthyism, but to also show how ridiculous and universal the ideas behind McCarthyism are. The main idea behind McCarthyism is that many are led to destruction by a few. Miller wants us to question the “bandwagon effect” in society and fear coercion. The girls were coached by a respected leader in *The Crucible* (Abigail Williams) as many of the people who testified before the congressional committee were coached by the zeal of Senator McCarthy (Cerjack 56). Miller wants American civilians to be distrustful towards corrupt leaders, and find an example in John Proctor, who stays true to his own principles and stands up against coercion from popular leaders and society (Cerjack 57).

Miller believes that when conscience is lost, humans are no longer complete, but become mindless members of a mob, following whatever our leader says with little to no protest. Miller is using *The Crucible* in order to protect people from making the same mistake that both villagers from Salem and innocent Americans have made: giving up their consciences to the government in order to save their lives (Cerjack 57).

Arthur Miller’s play *The Crucible* serves as an excellent allegory of the trials and convictions held during the McCarthy period. Using the New Historical analysis and researching the time that the play took place, (1692 during the Salem Witch Trials), and the time the play was written, (early 1950s during the McCarthy period), leads to the inevitable conclusion that both periods are parallel. The similarities between the two eras included the tactics that the courts used in order to receive testimonies, the paranoia of innocent civilians, and the theme of morality. Through studying the background information and understanding the principles of the text, and by using the New Historical analysis, it is obvious how much of a Socialist Arthur Miller was and how he used *The Crucible* to comment on American society.

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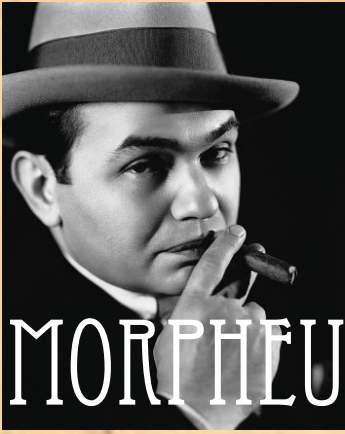
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POETRY



FAMILY RECIPE

BY: BARBARA PURVIANCE

Take from infant twins the mother.

Broil in a house fire,

One caused by a faulty wire.

Add a scarred daughter to the slurry.

Marinate in rum.

Sprinkle with nuts and crumbs.

Break a young man, toss with war to coat.

Fold in the captain of a riverboat.

One who could wiggle his ears.

Soak in water for thirty years.

Blend in a faithful, loving teacher

To make the dish a little sweeter.

Dredge in cancer from breast to brain.

Crush body, not soul, and drain.

Mix in a most vile sinner.

Strike with lightning.

Let simmer.

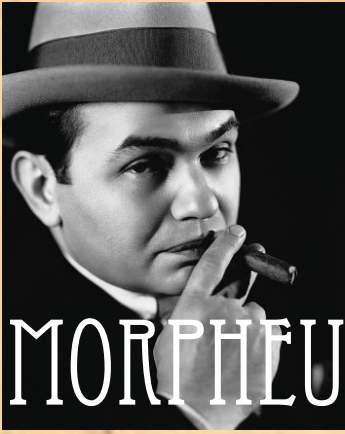
Balance flavor with another man.

One part smarts to three parts heart.

Drizzle with a woman's tears.

Beat continually for eighteen years.

Let rise.



HOME COMFORT

BY: RAY OUELLETTE

It came upon me
that I am hot cocoa. Not
the loveless, artificially-flavored,
three-dollars-a-cup cocoa at your local Starbucks, or your

fancy, exotic flavored,
expensive cocoa made from the finest chocolate
of Belgium. No, I'd be the classic cocoa,
a simple, relaxing,
instant, cocoa

ready to help, by
soothing a cold
releasing every pain and
stress of a bad day,

as a home comfort

for friend and family. Yes, I'd
be poured from my packet
into a mug; always

in hot water;
and out of the microwave with a thick

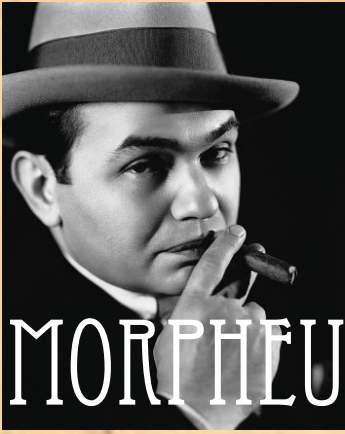
steam from the surface
of a smooth texture. I'd
carry the whole

world's tension on
my broad shoulders,
brown with plump marshmallows or
tan with foam. Willing to accept

my sacrifice, and be consumed
with a satisfaction from my purpose. So
if some cold child saw his

own breath or runny nose
when the heat was turned off
or the house door was locked;
I'd accept the homage and thanks
And become a friend, and die like a loved one

Which, as things occur, would be worth it.



SEAFOOD IS ALLERGIC TO ME

BY: LAURA VAN VALKENBURGH

The reason I don't like fishing
is not that I can't initially catch anything -
it's that the fish don't stay in the net
long enough to see I'm not going to eat them.

I can reel them in with great ease -
they're hooked as I pull them toward me.
But once I try to take them off the hook
and put them in a comfortable, safe
fishbowl, they frantically dive
back into the open water, flipping
goodbyes with their fins.

I would never hurt any fish.
In fact, I'd love to keep them around -
I was never much of a fan
of seafood. But every time I sail back
to the shore, I don't have any catches,
especially when the rain and wind
overtake my little boat.

VISUAL ARTS



BY: LIZ KUTZMAN

1ST



BY: LIZ KUTZMAN

2ND



BY: ISHARA HENRY

3RD

SENIOR
SEMINAR
IN
WRITING
2010

PUBLISHED: DECEMBER 2010
HEIDELBERG UNIVERSITY
TIFFIN, OH 44883

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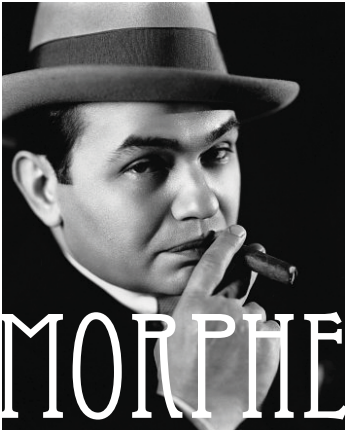
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OBJECTS

BY: LIZ KURTZMAN

Just four years ago last month, the city was paralyzed with fear. A killer stalked our streets, strangling victims and leaving bodies in his wake with no discernable pattern. His signature was unique and terrifying: a scrawled warning on a mirror over the body of his victim, telling the world to “Look Deep.”

These “Looking Glass Murders” spanned a period of 11 months and resulted in the deaths of 25 people, including Detective Gregory Dowell, the chief officer assigned to the case. Tragically, he was killed apprehending the only suspect in the Looking Glass Murders, Lewis Todd. Todd’s body was recovered only days later in the burnt wreckage of his home, and the city slept easy once again.

Until now.

Two nights ago, a body was found on the floor of a subway bathroom. The man had been strangled in the early hours of the morning by an unknown assailant. One of the mirrors in the room had been cracked.

The murder bears an eerie similarity to the Looking Glass Murders, but Det. Paul Vincent, the chief detective on the case, refused to elaborate on the parallels. “We may be looking at a copycat, it’s true, but at the moment we don’t have enough to go on to say either yes or no. It could be coincidence.”

Coincidence or not, citizens will not be able to rest easy until they see this killer behind bars.

The vender shook his head as he skimmed the article. A cold breeze rushed past the newsstand, rousing a cacophony of rustling paper. The old man tucked the paper into its plastic rack and shivered. Tugging his jacket tighter around his chest, he returned to his space inside the newsstand, where he could at least escape the blustery November wind.

A stranger approached and carefully lifted the newspaper from the rack and read the headline. In the nicked plastic of the magazine racks, the waxy reflection smiled.

----o0o----

Alice Dowell folded the paper carefully and slid it to the edge of the table. She stood and carried her mug to the sink, dumping its contents down the drain, untouched. The steam rose in tendrils as the liquid hit the cold metal. Her eyes followed its progress until she met the gaze of her reflection in the night-darkened window.

She reached for the curtain and pulled it shut.

----o0o----

Even in the early hours of the day, the police station was still filled with noise and commotion. The kitchenette, stocked with several coffee makers and supplies, was an oasis in the chaos. Paul filled two mugs and carried them through the hubbub.

He sat one of the mugs down on the desk next to a man clad in civilian clothes, his gray hair partially hidden by a tweed cap. "Thanks, son," the older man said, taking the cup.

"Thanks for coming by, Ed," Paul said, settling across from him, behind the sparse desk. In his few months here, he hadn't fully made the desk his. "I hate to inconvenience you."

"Don't worry about it," Edgar Worth said. "You know I'm in here nearly every week anyway. The boys always said that I was too restless for retirement."

"In any case, I appreciate it. It's tough being the new guy in town and handling this case," Paul replied, gesturing to the newspaper that lay between them.

"Afraid you're going to have to get used to that. The media eats up these sensational cases," Edgar told him. "I remember going through the same circus four years ago."

Paul took a cautious sip of the black liquid before replying. "What can you tell me about the Looking Glass Murders?"

Edgar sobered immediately. "Was the worst case I ever seen. Everybody was scared, everybody wanted answers, and nobody had them. That bastard just taunted us for months."

"Were you on the case?" The detective asked.

"No, thank Christ, I was working narcotics. I didn't want no part of that mess."

Paul picked up the case folder from his blotter and hefted it. "Well, who do you suggest I talk to?" He asked. "Dowell's notes are a mess. It's like trying to piece together a puzzle or something."

The retired cop took a swig of his coffee and squinted in thought. "Alice Dowell."

Paul stared. "Who?"

"Alice Dowell, Greg's wife," Edgar explained. "She was a cop, too. She did her time in the narcotics division with me, but she knew more about that case than any man, woman or child in this city, besides Greg, of course."

"What happened to her?" The detective asked.

"When Greg died, she requested a transfer. She's living in Picketsville now, working at City Hall," the old cop said. "At least she was a few months ago."

Paul drummed a pen on the desk. He glanced back at the file and then looked up. "Want to take a drive to Picketsville?"

----o0o----

She dreamed of Greg that night. She was standing at the end of the aisle, just like she had at their wedding, enveloped in a cloud of white taffeta. The pews were filled with family and friends, most of the latter clad in blue uniforms. The sun shone in the windows that fractured the beams into shards of colored light. Greg was waiting at the end of the aisle, a lopsided smile on his face. She knew he would make her laugh at the most inappropriate time, as he always did.

She took only a few steps before a cloud passed over the sun and the windows grew dark. It be-

came harder to distinguish the faces of the crowd in the sudden darkness. She looked down.

Now she wore a slip of shadow.

She continued the slow march down the aisle, unable to halt her awful progress. His coffin lay closed with his framed portrait sitting on top of the black veneer. Drawing closer, she could hear the strange silence of the mourners around her. When she climbed the few steps to the nave and leaned forward to look at Greg's face preserved in ink behind the glass, she saw the frame held no picture.

Her own image stared back at her, pale and alien. Captured by her own gaze, she stood locked for what seemed an eternity. A face swam next to hers, but she didn't move to look back at him. She knew he was in the mirror.

His whispered voice was like sand on glass and it made her shudder.

"Look deeper, Alice."

She woke gasping, her hand to her neck.

----o0o----

Edgar had volunteered to drive the forty miles to Picketsville, leaving Paul free to watch the scant scenery fly past.

"What's Dowell's wife like?" Paul asked.

"Al?" Edgar tapped the top of his steering wheel before he answered. "She was a good cop—the kind you'd want to back you up on a call. She never panicked, didn't get hot-headed...made some people think she was kind of a cold fish. But not Greg."

The old cop smiled at the memory. "He asks me one day, 'You ever seen her smile, Ed?' And I says, 'Yeah. But she don't do it often.' So he says to me, he says, 'I'm going to make her laugh, you watch.' And the bastard did it. Every day, he made her laugh. Two years later, they were married."

"Were they happy?"

"Oh yeah," Edgar shrugged. "Everybody's got their problems, you know, but they made it work."

"Problems like what?"

"They had to live with this case for a year. That kind of thing can really drive people apart."

----o0o----

When the secretary opened the door to the records room, Alice was studying a file full of blueprints. It didn't matter what the blueprints described or who wanted them. All that mattered was that the number in the corner of the plan matched the number on the request she was given.

"Alice?" The secretary inquired, though he could no doubt see that he had her attention. "There are some police officers here from Sanders. They want to speak with you."

Alice carefully stacked her books and slid them to the side, then took off her glasses, folded them, and put them into her desk drawer. Only once it was closed did she look up at the secretary and ask him to let the visitors come inside.

She stood and came out from behind the desk as Edgar and Paul entered. A smile softened the severe planes on her face as she embraced the jovial veteran. "Ed, how are you?"

"Old and getting older," he laughed, patting her back.

"Are you enjoying retirement yet?" She asked.

"It's okay," he said. "You enjoying filing yet?"

"It's okay," she echoed, her eyebrow cocked in challenge. Ed chuckled.

Paul watched awkwardly. The widow was younger than he had imagined, maybe in her mid-thirties, though there were lines on her face that made her appear careworn. She was plain, but she held herself tall.

He smiled politely and offered a hand. "Paul Vincent. I was transferred to the Sanders force four months ago."

She shook it. "And how do you like Sanders?"

"It seems like a nice city. Or at least, it did," he said.

Alice avoided his eyes and sat on the edge of her desk. "I saw the papers."

"They sure love to print bad news," Paul said. There was a momentary pause and he looked to his companion for support.

"Al, we came here to gather some information," Ed told her.

"Well, I can help you find anything in the records that you need. Do you have a new lead on the case? Something to do with Picketsville?" She still wouldn't meet the eyes of either policeman.

Ed leaned his hip against the desk next to her and took off his hat, ruffling his hair with one big-knuckled hand. "Actually, we came to talk to you about the Looking Glass Murders. The first ones. Thought you might shed some light on the new cases."

"You have the files, don't you? All Greg's notes?" She asked.

"We do," Paul interjected. "But Ed—we—thought that you might be able to help us relate this case to your husband's. Anything at all that you can tell us would be a great assistance."

Alice tapped her fingers. After a moment's pause, she spoke. "Of course. Whatever I can do to help." Her voice was as blank as the walls around them.

Paul cleared his throat. "We know his MO. But no one seems to understand his reasons. Did your husband have any theories?"

Her fingers continued to beat a pulse on her forearm. "Some. He thought that the killer felt unnoticed, unappreciated, and that he wanted attention through his crimes. That the mirrors were a symbol of self-absorption."

Paul tried to hide his frustration. "Yes, I read that in his notes."

Alice dropped her arms and got to her feet. "I'm afraid I don't know how I can help you. You have all the facts," she said, sidling around the desk. She began to search through her neat stacks of files, dismissing them with her lack of attention. "Anyway, Lewis Todd is dead. This copycat is a new entity entirely, one I know nothing about."

The two police officers watched her sit and engage herself with her work. Ed glanced at Paul and the detective nodded slightly.

"Alice," Ed began. "There are some details we haven't told the press."

"I imagine so," she responded. She opened the desk drawer and removed her glasses case. Carefully, she unfolded them and slipped them on.

Ed picked his hat up off the desk and nervously slapped it against his thigh. "The truth is, we lifted some prints off the victim's neck."

"That's great," she said.

"Maybe," the older man agreed. "But the thing is—"

Paul finished his sentence. "The fingerprints match Lewis Todd's."

----o0o----

Cissy washed her hands in the sink. She hated how bright the lights in the diner's bathroom were; it made her look washed out and dead. She squinted at her reflection. She really needed to get a facial or something. She looked awful.

When the man stepped up behind her, she was too surprised to be anything but angry. This was the women's restroom, after all.

"Hey, you can't—"

His hands on her throat cut off the rest of her protestation. Her fingers scrabbled at his, but she couldn't grip them and she slipped to her knees. The water continued to spew out of the faucet, masking the sounds of her desperate gasps.

After a moment, the struggles ceased and she slumped to the ground. The faucet handle turned, cutting off the water's flow and silence filled the room. The squeaking of the marker on the mirror cut through the quiet like a diamond.

There was an awful shatter, like a stone cracking in a tomb.

----o0o----

Alice watched the red and blue lights flash in the chill air. It all seemed so familiar, as if she had been inspecting crime scenes the day before instead of four years ago. The diner was filled with the quiet bustle of cops at work—talking to patrons, dusting for prints, snapping photographs in flashes of harsh light.

She stepped through the door and nodded to those in uniform that she recognized. Paul was standing in the back of the restaurant and she approached him. He greeted her solemnly.

"Thanks for coming."

She acknowledged his thanks, but said nothing. She didn't want to go through that swinging white door, but Paul held it open for her. She entered.

Alice was transfixed. She'd seen this tableau before, dozens of times.

The body lay on the floor, dropped as casually as a dirty paper towel. She was in her thirties, with bleached blond hair and a waitress's apron around her waist. Her eyes, glazed with death, stared at nothing.

The broken mirror caught her image and broke it again and again, until there were a dozen bodies lying on the linoleum. The cracks fractured the message written there.

“Look Often,” Paul read aloud, watching Alice take in the scene. “We have no clue what that means.”

“Look into a mirror often enough and you will see the devil.” Alice’s voice was barely a whisper, but Paul heard her clearly.

“What does that mean?” He asked, stepping closer so he could see her face. Her eyes were fixed on the body, not the mirror.

It took her so long to reply that Paul repeated his question. She looked up at him and her face was strangely calm. “It’s him,” she stated. “The Looking Glass Murderer.”

----o0o----

Greg was knee-deep in the Looking Glass case. He hadn’t gotten home until well after dark, ruining Alice’s surprise dinner, but they had eaten it cold, just the same. She had insisted on cleaning up, so when the phone rang, he was the one who went for it.

Greg answered it on the third ring. “Hello?” Alice entered the kitchen with a pile of dishes and he shot her a smile. She returned it before exiting again.

“Evening, Gregory.”

His smile dropped. “How did you get this number?” He snarled.

“I just wanted to check up on you,” the killer said. There was nothing threatening about his voice: it was wispy and quiet, as if he would blow away at any moment.

Greg lowered his voice. “Why did you call me on this phone?”

“Are you worried that Alice will hear you?”

The change in Greg was immediate. “Don’t you even say her name,” he demanded, his voice rising in anger and no small amount of fear. Greg glanced over and watched Alice return to the kitchen, drawn no doubt by the sound of his raised voice. Her smile faded as she took in her husband’s countenance. Her face was pale, but still, as she leaned against the opposite door.

The caller switched topics. “What did you think of the businessman in the hotel?” His tone was conversational, polite, like a neighbor discussing a football game.

Greg started cracking his knuckles, one by one, using the door jamb. “Why him?”

“The man was self-absorbed, caught up in his own inflated self-importance. He couldn’t even bother holding the elevator for a stranger.”

“That’s why you killed him? Because he didn’t hold the door for you?”

“Don’t oversimplify, Gregory. This isn’t about me. It’s about people. People don’t see others properly. All they can see is themselves. They need to learn to—”

“Look deeper, we’ve got it,” Greg interrupted. “However, it might be difficult for people to become more reflective if they’re dead.”

“Reflective. Excellent word choice.”

“Admit it. The mirror bit isn’t about your victims, it isn’t about enlightening people, it’s about you,” Greg said. “You feel overlooked, so you want revenge. Tack whatever philosophical label on it that you will, but you are just being petty.”

There was a lengthy silence and Greg began to wonder if the call had dropped. Alice stepped forward and gently took his hand, urging him to relax.

"Tell me, Gregory, have you ever been looking into a mirror when someone approached you?"

"Yes."

"What did you notice?"

Greg's eyebrows furrowed. "I noticed them approaching," he said, though his reply was more a question than an answer.

"Exactly. You had to take note because that person had invaded your sphere of self-absorption; they had intruded on your reflection. There is no ignoring a disruption like that."

Greg squeezed his wife's hand. "That's what you want, isn't it? For people to take note of you. When you appear behind them, they can't write you off anymore."

"Gregory, do you know what our ancestors said about mirrors?"

He suppressed a sigh. "No."

"There were a lot of superstitions tied to mirrors. One of them said that if you look often enough, you will see the devil."

"Is that what you are? The devil?" Greg asked, his voice hard.

"Good-night, Gregory. Give Alice my best."

The phone went dead. Greg slowly lowered it, then let it drop to the floor. Without a word, he pulled Alice into his embrace and held her so tightly that it was almost painful.

----o0o----

"Did he call Greg often?" Paul asked Alice.

"Not at home. That was the last call Paul got before—" Her voice faltered, for the briefest moment, before she carried on. "Before Lewis Todd was killed. Or at least we thought he was killed."

Paul watched Alice drink her tea across the table. Her hands weren't even shaking. He wasn't sure how to react to her. He could understand why her co-workers found her cold, but there was something about her that seemed strangely fragile, like a sculpture of ice. There were cracks in her careful façade and they were spreading rapidly.

"You never spoke to him?"

"No," she confirmed. "We talked about the case often and I was good at puzzles, so I helped him when I could. It was—we figured out who Lewis Todd was together." She shook her head. "I don't understand how we could have been wrong. We traced his addresses, his contacts, found his fingerprints and recovered DNA from the body."

"It's possible that the killer stole Todd's identity," Paul pointed out. "He was clearly very intelligent and if he had experience with computers, then he could have switched his fingerprints, his name, his information...there's really no way of knowing. Maybe Todd was just set up to be his patsy when he wanted to skip out on the game."

Alice offered no reply. She stared into her mug, waiting for answers to rise to the surface. As the silence stretched on, Paul's nerves stretched with it. "I know this is a lot to take in," he said finally.

"Seven years," Alice murmured. "That's all we had. I mourned my husband when he died, and I have every day since, but I told myself that he died to save lives—that it meant something more. Now I find out that the man who killed him is still alive and murdering innocent people." She raised her head and Paul drew back. For the first time, there was a flicker of something in her icy eyes, a hint of something that sent shivers down Paul's spine.

"He made a mistake, returning to the city. He'll make more," Paul promised.

She took her things without another word and Paul quickly offered to have Edgar give her a ride home. She refused. As she stood, Paul did his best to assure her.

"We'll get him," he said.

She looked down on him. "Yes, you will," she stated.

She left the station.

---oOo---

It was a long drive home. The night had turned to day and then to afternoon in her absence, and she drove straight to work instead of stopping at home. She was too awake to think of going to sleep, so she used her time at work to dig up the articles concerning the Looking Glass Murders. She poured over them, remembering every late night brainstorm and all the terrible phone calls in the middle of the night alerting Greg about the next body.

After awhile, she stopped reading the words on the pages. Instead her mind supplied her with new words to narrate her memories. This article titled "Looking Glass Murderer Strikes in Hospital Bathroom: Is No One Safe?" recounted the day that she decided to move back in with her mother. They had been fighting when the call came and she refused to take any more. "Dowell Assures City of Safety" told of the reconciliation, when he drove hours to pick her up and then take her across state lines for a night free of interruptions and horror.

Her hands paused over the article entitled "Decorated Officer Falls Victim to Serial Killer." To her eyes, there were no words in this article; just a picture of a packed church and a black coffin.

She slipped the file into her bag and left work without a word to anyone. It got dark earlier now and she had to switch on her headlights halfway home. Her house was a small ranch house in a development filled with identical small ranch houses. She parked her car and unlocked her garage door to slip inside.

Alice flipped on lights as she travelled through the house. It was no accident that there were no mirrors in her house, with the exception of one in the bathroom. Tonight it was a relief. She set her things on the kitchen table and removed her coat, hanging it over the back of a chair.

The clock on her microwave told her that it was still early evening, but she felt exhausted. She stifled a yawn as she walked down the hall to the bathroom and pushed the door open.

Instantly, her weariness fled.

She stared at the ruined mirror over the sink, the cracks radiating out from the center like a sun-burst. Her hand clenched the doorknob as if it could anchor her back to reality. Multiple Alices looked out from their glassy prison, pale and lifeless.

She backed out of the room and slammed the door shut, as if to trap the broken mirror in its porcelain prison. She moved briskly to the bedroom and opened the second drawer of the nightstand by her bed. It had been quite a while since she had held a gun, but it felt familiar and reassuringly solid in her

hand. She checked to see that it was loaded and switched the safety off.

With her free hand, she dialed three numbers on her cell phone. She snapped several commands at the emergency services operator and gave her address. Then she made another call, pacing the small bedroom as it went through. Edgar answered almost immediately.

"Hello?"

"Ed, I need you to call Paul Vincent. The killer was here, he might still be, I don't know. Get here as soon as possible," she said, her words clipped.

"Jesus Christ," Ed said. "Where are you?"

"Home," she answered. She reeled off her address once again.

"Sit tight, we'll be there as soon as we can," Ed assured her.

"Thank you," she said. She hung up. Panic was fluttering against her skull, so she closed her eyes and took a deep breath until her nerves stopped rebelling against her. She rose to draw the blinds, opting to set her phone down instead of her gun, and shut and locked her bedroom door. She returned to the bed and reached for the phone. It rang.

The number was unknown, but she didn't have Paul's number, so she answered it just the same.

"Alice. It's been too long."

All the panic that she had forced away came roaring back with double strength. She sat heavily onto the bed. No words would come out of her mouth.

"Come now, Alice, how are we supposed to have a civil dialogue if you won't keep up your end of the conversation?" She had never heard him speak before, but she had no doubt that she was talking to the Looking Glass Murderer.

"You were here." It wasn't a question.

"I was," he agreed. "You have a lovely home. A bit drab, perhaps, but you were never the home decorating type. Gregory was really the more domestic one, wasn't he?"

"I'm not going to humor you. I don't have to listen to this," she said.

"True, but as long as I'm on the phone with you, you'll know I'm not in the house with you. It's simple, really."

She clenched her hand tighter around her automatic. "Get to the point. Why did you call? Why did you break in? I'm not involved in this case anymore."

"Don't lie to me, Alice. I saw you with the young detective. Honestly, I'm glad you're back in the game. Things haven't been the same without you and Gregory."

"Don't you even say his name," she snarled.

"Of course, I'm sorry. It's a touchy subject. But I hope you don't mind me saying that it's good to have you back."

Alice resisted the urge to throw the cellphone across the room. "I was never on the case."

"Alice, don't think I'm an idiot. I've always suspected that Gregory got his best ideas from you—like the Lewis Todd discovery."

She made no reply.

"When your husband and I worked together, I noticed that there was a period of a few weeks where Gregory's performance was a little...lackluster. I didn't know what had happened until I learned that the two of you had split. I'm partly to blame, I know, so I hope that you will accept my belated apology."

"Why are you back, why now?" Alice interrupted. She couldn't stand to hear him talk about Greg like they were old friends.

"Ah, yes, well. It turns out that I am entirely too good at hiding. Isn't that strange? It's what every person in my profession wants—to be unseen, to never be found, to be uncatchable."

"Coming back to your old hunting grounds isn't a wise decision if you don't want to be caught," Alice pointed out.

"You're right, of course. Unless there's nothing to catch."

"What does that mean?"

"Through my actions, I am becoming a legend, a mythical being. And legends live on in the minds of the people—they cannot be killed."

Contempt colored Alice's words. "You're no legend. You're a boogeyman, a bad dream that people will forget as soon as it's over."

"I am not—" The anger escaped before he could reign it back in. "It's an incomplete judgment, Alice. You don't have all the facts."

"I have enough to tell that you are an egotistical and impotent man who takes his insecurities out on others," she said. "You're a monster."

The voice seemed amused. "But I can stand face to face with my own reflection, Alice. Can you look yourself in the eye?"

The line went dead. Alice dropped the phone like it was a hot iron and let it lay on the floor; its display still lit with the word "UNAVAILABLE."

----o0o----

Paul's long strides ate up the sidewalk as he hurried to Alice's front door. The windows of the one story ranch blazed in the darkness. Inside and out, the shadows of police officers were busy at work. Paul had to flash his badge more than once to make it through the front door.

Alice was seated in the kitchen at the tall counter. An officer was speaking to her, but if she heard, she made no sign. She lifted her head when Paul entered and their eyes met.

"Hey. How you holding up?" Paul asked.

"It's not the worst night I've had," she said. "But it's close."

She rose and asked him if he wanted some tea. As she prepared it in the kitchen, he spoke with the officer in charge, who was clearly annoyed at the interruption. The two discussed the evidence the Pickettsville police had found when they arrived.

"Not a blessed thing," the man said. He shrugged. "Except for the cracked mirror, there's no sign anyone was even here. It's like looking for a ghost."

"He's not a ghost," Alice snapped from the kitchen. "He spoke with me on a phone. He's a man."

Paul stepped forward and tried to take the kettle from her hands. "Let me take care of that. You should sit down," he said.

She refused to release it. "I need to keep busy," she said. Neither of them moved for several seconds, so she tried a different tact. "Please."

Reluctantly, Paul stepped back and leaned against the counter to observe her work.

The officer in charge cleared his throat. "Well, we've nearly finished, ma'am. We'll be heading out here shortly. There'll be a patrolman parked on the street all night. Don't hesitate to call for any reason."

"Thank you, Rob," Alice said.

"I'll be staying the night, too," Paul said. "To keep an eye on things." Alice glanced at him, but he ignored her.

They bid the officers good night and Paul watched the patrol cars pull away, with the exception of a single cruiser on the corner. He returned to the kitchen as Alice sat two steaming mugs on the table. "I didn't ask if you wanted honey or sweetener, but they're on the counter."

He nodded his gratitude and added some sugar to the bitter drink. They sat in silence for some time, sipping the hot tea. Finally, Alice spoke. "Thank you for coming. You really don't need to stay, though. There's an officer outside."

"I feel better knowing you're safe," he said. "After all, I dragged you into this."

She neither agreed nor disagreed. "I hate to take you away from your family," she said, gesturing towards his ring finger.

He twisted the gold band on his finger. "Don't worry," he said. "You're not taking me away from anyone. My wife left months ago." He pulled the ring off and inspected it. "I guess I just haven't been able to get used to not wearing it."

"I'm sorry," Alice said immediately.

He shrugged and pushed the ring back over his knuckle. "It happened before I moved to Sanders. It's why I transferred, actually. I was married to the chief's daughter."

Alice stirred the tea with her spoon. "Did she have a reason?"

Paul looked up at her and gave a startled laugh. "You don't believe in beating around the bush, do you?"

"I'm not very good at talking about emotions. Or relationships," she admitted.

"No, it's fine," Paul said. "She thought she had a reason, I guess." When Alice made no move to speak, he elaborated. "She started to think that maybe I married her to get in good with her father and there was really no way to convince her otherwise. So, eventually, she just couldn't take it anymore and she walked away."

"And then you left."

"And then I left. I was the top homicide detective in Hudson, but I just couldn't stay," he said.

Alice nodded thoughtfully. Paul watched her until finally he had to speak. "What are you thinking?"

"I think that you're not very broken up about your wife," she said.

Paul started to protest, but Alice took no notice. She rose and took her mug to the counter. As she spoke, she methodically started to put away all the tea ingredients. "When I lost Greg, it was like some pit had opened up inside of me. It's been four years and I still feel the emptiness." She closed the cupboard and leaned on the countertop, her back still to Paul. "It was my fault, a little bit."

Paul rose and followed her into the kitchen, but stopped just short of touching her. "It wasn't your fault."

She turned and regarded him through dry eyes. "I was the one who traced Lewis's identity and led Greg to his house. I couldn't go because it wasn't my case, but I put him on the track. That's when they think the killer got him. If I hadn't told him the name, he might be alive."

----o0o----

There wasn't a sign from the Looking Glass Killer: no bodies, no phone calls, no notes. So Alice spent the next two days occupying herself with as many trivial chores as she could. She had sorted through all the contents of her basement, re-filed the blueprints of all the buildings on Main Street at work, and now she was halfway through cleaning her house from top to bottom. Paul had been checking in on her frequently, so when his number appeared in her phone, she answered it prepared to assure him of her safety, once again.

"We found another body," Paul said without preamble. Alice carefully lowered the sponge she was using to clean the refrigerator and let it drop into the soapy bucket at her side.

"Where?" She asked.

"Outside the city. In Lincoln. Nowhere near Picketsville," he added.

Alice picked the sponge back up and started to scrub in loose circles. "Where in Lincoln?"

"A Laundromat. I'll give you directions in a moment—"

Alice interrupted him. "Was it The Spic and Spin?"

There was a pause. "Yes. How did you know that?"

"Greg and I used to wash our clothes there. We lived just around the corner," she said. Suds had started to drip down the white door and onto the floor.

Paul swore. "I had no idea. Listen, I can have the officer on watch drive you here if you feel uncomfortable driving yourself."

Alice rose from her kneeling position and wiped the soap from her hands with a towel. "I'm not coming."

"I understand that this is really difficult for you, but I'll be with you every step of the way," Paul said.

"I don't think you really understand. You cannot understand what it is like to talk to this monster or see his handiwork and know that he is showing off. I'm done indulging him. If he wants me, he can come get me, but I will not play games," Alice said.

She threw the towel onto the counter and yanked the curtain open to stare into the night, as if she hoped to see him outside, waiting.

"We need your help to catch this guy," Paul reminded her.

"Do you?" She asked. "Or do you just need bait?"

Paul did not answer.

"You use people, Paul, when you need them. You used Ed to meet me, you're using me to get to the killer. Maybe I can understand why..." She trailed off, so Paul finished her sentence with words the temperature of cold granite.

"Why my wife left?" She said nothing, so he continued. "This has nothing to do with me. People are dying. Do you want to be responsible for more deaths?"

"You mean, in addition to my husband's?" She asked. There was a long pause. "I'm sorry, Paul. I'm done with this case. I wish you luck. Please keep me posted," she said finally.

"I'll do what I can," he said. The call ended and Alice carefully sat the phone down on the counter.

----o0o----

Paul called her twice the next day and she didn't answer. She received a text from Paul that weekend when she visited the cemetery.

Sorry. I was out of line.

Alice glanced up from her phone at Greg's headstone. She never typed a reply.

----o0o----

"Vincent!"

Paul looked up as one of the officers barged into his office. Before he could formulate a question, the man blurted out his message.

"Paul, we've got a lead. That key we found at the Laundromat was traced to a house outside Sanders. Big old farmhouse."

Paul stood and grabbed his jacket. "Grab Anderson and Thomas. I want to be on the road in five minutes."

He grabbed his phone and stared at it for a long second. Then he dialed a number.

----o0o----

"Alice. I know you don't want to talk to me, but I think you should know we might have a lead on the killer. We found a key at the Laundromat and we've traced it. I'll give you the address if you want to meet us there." Pause. "I'm sorry about what I said. You were right, I suppose, but I refuse to believe I made a mistake in asking you for help. I still think you have a part to play before it's over."

Alice ended the voicemail. She stared out the window, where dark clouds threatened to burst on the steely sky. Indecision paralyzed her. She could think of nothing to say to Paul, so she left the phone and walked around the block until raindrops began to fall.

When Alice got a text from Paul, the rain had started to fall in drumming sheets down the windowpanes.

LGK dead. We cornered him. You can see for yourself if you come soon.

She let her mind consider it. Did she want to wade back into that mess again? She should stay out of it.

But then again, to see him dead and to know that it was over...

She grabbed her car keys.

----o0o----

Alice slammed the car door and tucked her coat around her. The street lights set the cold rain aglow so the black pavement shone. There were two cruisers in addition to Paul's sedan, but there were no other homes in the isolated area. The house itself was nicer than she had imagined. She bowed her head and jogged to the front door. It wasn't latched, so she pushed it open.

She shook the rain from her clothes as best she could. The house was grand enough to have a foyer and unnecessary candle sconces. She took stock in seconds, observing the plush pale carpet and the pleasant décor.

Then she noted the silence.

The cheery lights couldn't banish the heaviness of it, or the finality. There was something nagging at her, something that had started the moment she had opened the door, but only now did it start to form into a full-blown feeling of dread. She couldn't keep herself from stepping forward. One step, then another.

The first body she saw was in the living room. A man was lying outstretched on the carpet, like a coat flung carelessly to the ground. Alice took note of his face, but it was like someone else was doing it, someone far away and detached from the scene. She backed away and found herself in the kitchen. Here there was a woman slumped across the table, a rope around her neck.

Alice thought that she would feel numb, that her body would be as heavy as lead. But she felt oddly energized, as if every fiber of her being was moving, the molecules hopping up and down in anticipation of the next blow.

She almost expected the scene she found in the dining room. Overhead, an electric chandelier swung, but shed no light in the dim room. Two glass china cabinets occupied the east wall, their expensive contents arranged in front of mirrored backing. The west wall was a bank of windows that looked out over the street, opaque from rain and darkness. The dining table was long enough to seat eight and tonight half of its chairs were filled.

The bodies of the cops were arranged in the seats, some of them leaning over their seat backs, glassy eyes open and staring, while others slumped forward, their torsos bent in death. They hadn't died cleanly. Blood was splattered on the tablecloth and their sullied clothes. The cop directly across from her was face down on the white tablecloth, his hand still clutching his gun. It was Paul.

Some part of Alice acknowledged that she was about to die. This, she understood, was what had happened to Greg when he went to apprehend Lewis and met the killer instead. Now Paul was dead, and she was soon to follow. Should she scream? Cry? Beg for mercy? She only knew that if she opened her mouth, she would probably vomit, so she pressed her lips together and tried to think of something to keep her from ending up a puddle on the ground. She reached for the gun concealed under her jacket and yanked it from its holster.

Slowly, very slowly, she eased forward, the gun held in front of her. The barrel was shaking slightly. There were three more cops besides Paul. She recognized Officer Mike Anderson, but the other two were strangers. As she drew closer, she tried to discern if any of them were breathing. Paul was bleeding, probably from bullet wounds, judging by the shape and spread of the bloodstains on his clothes. One of the unknown cops was also bleeding, but Anderson and the third were clean. The killer had probably strangled

them.

She was level with the table now, between two of the bodies. Paul was across from her. She bent closer to see if his chest was moving.

A hand shot out and grabbed her wrist. Alice cried out and squeezed the trigger, but the iron grip forced her arm wide and the bullet buried itself harmlessly in the wall. The closest body, one of the two men she hadn't been able to identify, rose swiftly. His hand was still attached to her wrist and his other hand wrapped around her throat, choking her scream.

He spun her around in a gross parody of a dance, then drove her down, pinning her onto the table. He smashed her hand against the tabletop until her grip loosened and the gun slipped out of her fingers. With her left hand, she swung a punch at his head, but it was sloppy and barely glanced off of his shoulder. He quickly transferred his hand from her throat to hold down the errant fist.

The whole exchange had taken less than ten seconds. Alice's chest heaved as she tried to catch her breath through the lingering pain in her throat. His face hovered a foot above hers in the darkness, his pale hair and skin almost glowing in the faint light. His grip was surprisingly strong. She squirmed, but she was reluctant to get any closer to the monster whose body was pressed against hers, holding her down.

"Welcome, Alice," he said, a smirk on his thin lips.

She turned her face away and scanned the tabletop for her gun. It was out of sight, probably on the ground somewhere.

"It's good, isn't it?" He said, jerking his head to indicate the bodies strewn around them. "It's different from my usual tastes, but I thought something a little grander was needed."

Her heart was beating faster than the rain that pounded on the window panes now. "I'm not going to play your games," she said in a voice that hardly trembled at all.

"Can the fly deny the spider when it is caught in his web?" He was surprisingly bland-looking. She could have seen him before and looked right through him.

"Who were those people?" She asked. "The man and the woman?"

He shrugged. "Does it matter? The setting was perfect. And I needed a way to pull my quarry in."

"Why?"

"Alice, do you know how little human beings understand their own reflections? They misjudge the size and location of their mirror selves. Some stroke victims even try to reach through the mirror to grab reflected objects. Perfectly rational people try to hold onto reflections like they are real things."

He leaned in close and Alice shuddered. "People can't distinguish reality from fiction, legend from fact, or hero from villain. I choose to live in between these distinctions—the space between the real world and the mirror world."

Alice stared into his eyes. This was the face of the man that killed her husband. She felt the darkness rise up from the pit inside of her, spreading out to her icy limbs and thawing them. She was almost vibrating with rage.

"The metaphor is more or less accurate," she spat, her voice as cold and hard as gun metal. "You use your reflection to intimidate and hurt people, but the truth is, there's nothing there. You are nobody."

His brow furrowed angrily. "Be careful what you say, Alice."

"You're going to kill me," she said. "Just like you killed Greg and Paul. Nothing I say is going to change that."

He leaned forward and whispered into her ear. "You understand, it had to end here, just you and I, with no—"

She slammed her forehead into his nose and there was a resounding crack as the cartridge broke. His hands released her and flew to his face, trying to hold in the blood that spurted from his damaged appendage. Alice bunched her legs into chest and shoved out hard, sending him stumbling back from the table.

She rolled off the table and started scrambling for her gun. It lay underneath a chair. She reached for it, but before her fingers could close on the barrel, a hand grabbed a fistful of her hair and hauled her backwards. The killer pulled her to her feet and, in a startling show of strength, he gripped her shoulder and launched her into the nearest cabinet.

Alice barely had time to register what was happening when the pain hit her. Shards of glass and china rained down and she could feel more of it piercing her flesh. She heard a horrible choking noise and realized that it had issued from her own throat.

The pain brought her back, grounded her in the moment. Blinking, she registered the killer, only feet away from her, bucking back and forth. His face was a sheet of blood and rage as he lurched toward her.

"You're ruining this, Alice," he snarled, grabbing a handful of her shirt and yanking her upright. She clutched at the cabinet, trying to escape. Instead, a long splinter of mirror broke off in her hand, cutting into her palm. Her fingers curled around it.

He let go of her shirt and grabbed her neck with both hands, bringing her face inches from his. "You were going to be the last. It would have been full circle, a perfect scene," he told her. She clutched at his wrist with one hand and rose to her tiptoes. There was a vein throbbing in his neck. "It was going to be so poetic."

"Not as poetic as this," she gasped. She plunged the mirror splinter into his neck as hard as she could.

He released her and tried to pull at the glass, but it was too late. Blood bubbled from the wound and dripped off the jagged edges of the mirror, splattering on Alice as she fell backwards onto the remains of the cabinet. She scrambled away, heedless of the glass and splinters, as he fell to his knees before her. His eyes were wide with pleading and panic. He opened his mouth wordlessly.

Alice sat up, her back stiff and straight, and regarded him coldly. He crumpled sideways, as if all the air had left his body at once. She allowed some time to pass before her shoulders slumped in relief. She closed her eyes. The only sound was the rain rattling against the windows. She was alone.

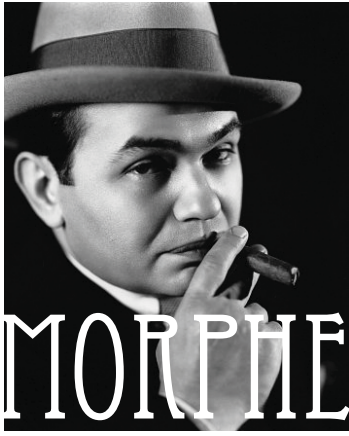
She edged around the corpse that had once been the creature of her nightmares. Blood was spreading across the hardwood floor and flowing through the cracks in the wood. Cradling her sliced hand against her chest, she stumbled to her feet and felt her way along the table, not quite trusting her feet. She sank into the empty chair next to Paul.

With her good hand, she placed two fingers on his neck, feeling for a pulse: it was faint, but it was there. Something inside of her loosened and she breathed out. She found his hand and gripped it tightly. She wanted to assure him that help would come, that things would be okay, but she couldn't speak.

She had to call for back-up. But when she reached for the phone still nestled in her pocket, she saw the blood dripping from the ugly gash on her hand. It didn't hurt yet, but it would. She looked back to

Paul's hand. She'd have to let go to dial the phone.

Her fingers gripped his tightly and her eyes traveled to the body on the floor. It hadn't moved. Then she looked over to the bank of windows. Her face, pale and blood-splattered, stared back through the rain-soaked glass. She met her reflection's eyes. Slowly, one finger at a time, she let go.



THE ORDER OF THINGS

BY: AMANDA STOVICEK

MORPHEUS '10

Sam's eyes were sour. Sitting before him, I felt his eyes glaring. If he stared any harder his eyes would fall out of his head. I imagined them like sour grapes, sinking, seeping, and rotting out of his eye sockets. I fixated on them for a long time. I suppose I was staring just as hard as he, but I didn't really care. All I could think about were his green irises and the way they dripped with disgust. *So what?* I thought. *So what, punk? You disgust me too!* I couldn't look away, I couldn't think about anything. Just his eyes. And then, the trance was broken, Sam's eyes shifted and his new girl was there holding his hand. His irises no longer held disgust, but adoration. I felt like vomiting.

True, the scene before me wasn't anything new, but I was tired and reminiscing and the alcohol in my blood was bringing me down. All I wanted was to spite him, to connect with someone and see him lose his connection. But the two of them stood as strong as ever. Why? I couldn't tell you at all.

So I went outside. I stepped into the night and opening a half-dented pack of cigarettes, I lit one. The wind caught the flame off of my lighter. I flicked four more times, cupping my hands around the end of the white stick. *Stupid fucking smoke*, I thought. I tried turning away from the wind but it kept swirling around me like a vortex or tornado or something. I groaned audibly and stomped my foot. Childish I know, but my frustration was heightening and as I kept flicking the lighter I kept getting closer and closer to tears.

Finally I slumped down onto the step. I still clung to the unlit cigarette; my other hand clutched the end of my dress ripping at the lace. I choked out sobs but felt sicker for it. *Why the hell is this happening?* I couldn't think of anything to comfort myself. Not even the damn cigarette could do.

"It won't do any good to cry."

His voice was not familiar. Immediately, I stopped crying and wiped my face. I snorted loudly,

sucking the snot back in—very unlady-like, but at the time I didn't care. Pushing myself off the stoop I searched for his face. He was at the end of the porch to my left, holding a lit cigarette. The minute I saw it I felt like breaking all of my smokes in frustration.

"How the hell did you get that lit?" I said through gritted teeth.

He didn't look at me. "They're gonna stay here anyway."

"What do you know about it?" I spat.

"They don't just appear and then disappear. They're here for a reason."

"What are you talking about?"

"The dragons."

His response shocked me. "What?"

In the shadow I saw his hand point up. I followed it. All I saw was a great big blackness. No stars, no clouds, just darkness. I was confused. The city was usually visible on the horizon especially during the late night when the sky was darkest. But everything around looked black. I couldn't really even discern the trees on the edge of the property line. It wasn't the alcohol either; my tears had started to sober me up. I was beginning to feel foolish standing out here with him. I was beginning to feel like an idiot for crying.

"There's no such thing," I finally said.

"There isn't," he said, "and yet..."

His hand remained pointed skyward as he dragged on his cigarette.

"Hey, do you think I could light mine off of yours?" I showed him the unlit stick. He offered me his and I lit mine, slowly taking a drag, letting the nicotine sink in. I looked at him. It was dark, the light from inside illuminated only part of his face. His hair covered the rest of it, swept across his forehead in the typical indie style. He was wearing a dark colored t-shirt and jeans—very non-descript.

"What's your name?" I said.

“Marcus.”

“I’ve never seen you before.”

He dropped his hand, but his head remained inclined upward. He didn’t say anything and I sat there for a minute wondering if I should just leave him alone. I sucked the cigarette faster, trying to inch away. He suddenly looked at me.

“You were crying because of the dragons, right?”

I stared.

“I mean, you shouldn’t cry about it. They aren’t gonna harm us. They’re just here, for something. I don’t know what yet, but I intend to find out.”

He turned his whole body to face me and took out another smoke, lighting it with ease. He offered me one from his pack. I remember thinking I should refuse, but he sort of pressed it on me, pulling it out of the pack and sticking it in my hand. I lit it off my previous cigarette.

“They’ve only just appeared, you see. It’s only been a couple of hours.”

“Have you been out here during the whole party?”

“They’re just fascinating—what? Oh yeah, I don’t like my brother’s friends. But the dragons are just—”

“Your brother?”

“I—yeah. Sam’s my brother.”

I made a sort of gurgling noise and turned away; the urge to vomit was back. “I never heard about you,” I managed.

“I don’t live here.”

He was looking up again. I smoked a little faster and I felt my stomach easing. I leaned against the railing of the porch and looked up, too.

“Why?”

He sort of huffed. “Can we talk about the dragons?”

I coughed on my smoke. *Why is he still going on about that?* I thought.

“They are much more interesting than me, and they’re here.”

His last comment struck me. *They’re here? So are you?* Maybe he wasn’t all there—maybe that’s why Sam never talked about him. Maybe Marcus was half-retarded or something. Or maybe he was crazy. I debated going inside. But then Marcus took my arm and pulled me off of the porch.

“If you look up, there. See, where the North Star might be on a clear night. That’s a dragon.”

I looked. I squinted. I bunched up my eyes trying to focus on the infinite black. There might be something... a flicker. My eyes could be playing tricks, like when you close your eyes and press on your eyelids and see incredible colors.

“Do you see?” Marcus asked.

“I don’t really... there’s—”

“You have to try harder, Silvia, or you won’t see them.”

I pulled my arm out of his hold. “How do you know my name?”

“You’re Sam’s Silvia, I know that.”

I stared at him.

“Sam talks about you all the time. Silvia this... Silvia that... It gets old.”

“But you said—”

“My brother and I talk, even if I don’t live with him. He calls me sometimes. He called me today to come over. That’s why I’m here.”

I crossed my arms. Marcus was a little taller than me so I couldn’t look him directly in the eyes, but I tried my best. He looked down at me and moved his mouth as if to say something else. We watched each other for a little while, the light from the house shining on half of our faces. I thought about Batman and Two-Face. The dark and the light side. Were we entering the dark side with Marcus’ story about the

dragons? I didn't really get him. I finally looked away.

"Back to the dragons?" he asked.

"Yeah," I conceded, "the dragons."

"There's five of them. But one's a baby—I think they call them hatchlings."

Hatchling? I thought. *Jesus, who is this guy...*

"Are you looking?" he said.

I raised my eyes to the black night.

"You can feel their wings, too. The swirling wind? That's them."

"Come on, now. Wind's wind."

"But when have you ever known wind to swirl? To follow you around? It wouldn't let you light your cig."

"Wind can swirl... tornados," I offered feebly.

"It's their wings, one was hovering over you at the time. Checking you out. He didn't light you on fire, so I guess you're cool."

My mouth dropped, worse than in the cartoons. "What is wrong with—"

"Don't believe me?" He interrupted. "It's true. You just have to look harder, Sil."

I cringed at the nickname. Sam's nickname for me. Wonderful. "I am looking, Marcus dear," I mocked.

"No you're not." His tone was completely serious.

"This is dumb," I groaned. "Alright," I stepped away from the porch and moved into the middle of the yard. I spun around raising my arms, "Hello, dragons? Show yourselves so that Marcus doesn't look like a fool! Show yourselves! Dragons!"

I stopped. I looked at Marcus. He was making a face and I couldn't read his expression.

“What?” I said.

He laughed a little, then pointed up.

I looked. I raised my eyes and I stared up at the sky. And I saw them. I couldn’t believe my eyes and I almost fell over from craning my head so much. I spun, I gawked, I laughed out loud. Marcus was laughing too, but I think he was laughing at me.

“Believe me now?”

“Oh my god,” I managed.

The darkness in the sky had given way to a group of shining cobalt bodies. The dragons. They were large, maybe bigger than the house behind me. They had short stubby arms like the T-Rexes of Jurassic fame, but their claws were a marvel to look at—like giant rapiers slashing through the sky. The dragons’ wings were stretched like a bat’s with hooked claws at the points. Their tails were a thin membrane of iridescent strings that reminded me of a spider’s web after rain.

“Oh my god,” I said again.

“They are pretty glorious,” Marcus said wryly.

“This is unbelievable. Someone had to... You didn’t lace your cigarettes with LSD or something right?”

“Hah, that’s not a bad idea.”

I looked at him.

“But no, Sil, this is real.”

We were on our fourth cigarette. Marcus had his legs crossed Indian style and I had mine dangling off of the swing. The swing was under a tree at the property line and it swayed under the wind from the dragon’s wings. We watched them; they seemed to hover over the house, over the neighborhood. They

circled.

“Are they searching for something?” I asked.

“Let’s see,” Marcus thought for a moment. “What’s there to find here? High schoolers partying? You and I on a swing? Old people watching re-runs of *Frasier*? I don’t think they’re looking for anything.”

“They’ve got to have some purpose.”

“And we’ve got to figure it out. But I don’t think they’re searching.”

“But what... Hmmm. Could they be lost?”

“Lost.”

“Yeah.”

“I think, maybe. I think that might be it. Why else would they circle?”

“Do you think that they’re harmless?”

“Oh no. You see their claws right? I’m sure they breathe fire, too. Most dragons do. No, no. They’re not harmless.”

“Then why aren’t they attacking?”

“We don’t pose a threat.”

“Oh.” It was simple enough. “They’re kind of boring.”

Marcus looked at me. “Boring? No, no, Sil. They’re amazing. Look at them. Have you ever seen a creature like them?”

“Well, no. But—”

“They are one of a kind, undiscovered. We have to watch them, we have to document them... something. We have to stay.”

I watched Marcus as he spoke. Now that I saw the dragons, too, I understood his passion. They were fascinating... to a point. They just kinda circled, without going anywhere. I wondered what they

wanted, if they were gonna hurt us, but most of all I just wished they would do something different. Marcus didn't mind though. His face was raised upwards with a sort of half smile. I think he felt that he was a part of history. I just kinda felt silly watching them.

"Marcus, where do you live?"

"Hmm?"

"If you don't live here with Sam, where do you live?"

His body visibly tensed, but he answered, "With my Granny."

"Oh. Do you mind if I ask why?"

"My parents and I don't get on well."

"But you and Sam?"

"We are alright. He was too young to understand when it—shit."

He looked at me. I felt his gaze piercing my eyes and I wanted to turn away in discomfort but he shook his head slightly.

"I'm—" I said.

"No... whatever, I let part of it slip."

He paused for a second and lit another cigarette. I took one out of my own pack and lit it. We stared at each other for a second, the cherries on our cigarettes lighting our faces up. He smiled slightly.

"It's grim," he began.

"I can handle grim."

"I was seven and Sam was four. I had an older brother too, half brother on my dad's side. His name was Dennis." Marcus looked at me, as if to see if I was still there.

"Dennis and I were playing at the pond. Sam was home, too young. Dennis wanted me to swim out and catch a stick like a dog," he laughed, but I could see the pain on his face. His hand was hovering in the

air, kinda of shaking. He stared at it, then set it beside my hand on the bench.

“I told him that was stupid, but Dennis said he’d tell mom and dad that I wet my pants if I didn’t do it. So I did. I swam out into the center of the lake and got the stick,” he paused. “I was swimming back when my foot got stuck on seaweed or something and I panicked. I screamed and screamed and Dennis jumped into the water to help. He unhooked my foot, but... I must have kicked him.” His voice was empty. “I made it to shore, but Dennis never did.”

I closed my eyes. I breathed slowly and I tried to figure out what to say but my brain wouldn’t function. I thought that if I were Marcus I would never live it down... and I am sure he didn’t.

When I opened my eyes Marcus had gotten off of the swing and was lying in the grass. He puffed on his cigarette and watched the sky, the dragons. I stayed on the swing.

“I’m sorry,” I said.

“Sam was their favorite and I knew it from the day Dennis died onward. They never stopped pushing it in my face. I moved out when I was sixteen. The woman I live with... we just call her Granny. She’s a landlord. Rents out rooms in her house to boarders. She’s a wonderful lady.”

I got down off of the swing and tossed my cigarette away. I lay down next to Marcus. His chest rose and fell with each breath and I felt my own breathing sync with his. I almost wanted to fall asleep.

“But,” Marcus said. “The dragons.”

My eyes flicked up. They were still there. They weren’t fake. “The dragons,” I said.

Marcus’ hand found mine and he held it tightly.

We laid there until my phone went off. I answered. My mother. I got up and I left Marcus on the grass.

“Will you be around this week?” I asked him.

“I don’t know.”

“Oh,” I paused. “I have to go.”

“Don’t forget about the dragons.”

I looked at them in the sky. “I won’t.”

When I woke up that morning they were not in the sky. I kept checking, but maybe sunlight was their weakness. Maybe they were vampire dragons or something. I got dressed and I started walking. Sam’s house was only four blocks away.

As I came around the corner I saw Sam and his parents on the front porch. A man in a suit was standing beside them shaking his head. I watched carefully trying to read their lips, but I didn’t really have any idea what I was doing. Finally I crossed the street and walked up to the house.

Sam saw me coming. His eyes sort of bugged out and became sour, just like last night. I had the urge to call him a punk to his face, but really I just wanted to see Marcus. As I neared the sidewalk, Sam got off the porch and walked to me. His hands were shoved in his jacket pockets and he looked furious. He met my eyes and I saw that, in addition to being as sour as ever, they were puffy and bloodshot.

“What are you doing?” He grunted.

“I was coming to see—”

A cop car suddenly pulled onto the street, its sirens screeching.

“Is everything ok?” I asked.

“Yeah, fine.”

The cop car slowed in front of Sam’s house and slid into the driveway. I stared at Sam and he sort of huffed and turned away.

His voice was nasally when he spoke. “Uh, my brother went missing last night.”

My whole body froze up, “Marcus?”

Sam’s head shot around. “How do you know?”

"I didn't, but I met him last night. What happened?"

"I don't know. My parents, they didn't even know he was here. They're denying the whole thing, saying he was at his home."

"But, he was here, I saw him. I talked to him, I..." images of the dragons popped into my head but I refrained from mentioning them.

"Yeah, they won't care. They've convinced the cops, they've almost convinced me."

"But he's your brother."

"But he was crazy."

I stared. I couldn't say anything. The dragons were still vivid in my head, I couldn't have imagined them... but Marcus was crazy. Could crazy people be so influential as to cause other people to hallucinate too? I didn't know.

"He was crazy?" I managed.

"The police found his meds at his group home, he hadn't taken them."

"But—he said you invited him? Why would you invite him if he was crazy?"

Sam glared at me. "Sil, he was supposed to get picked up by a car, a taxi service from the home. I called it. We have visiting hours. He wasn't even supposed to be around during the party. Jesus."

"I don't understand; he seemed so sane."

Sam laughed bitterly. "I loved my brother but he was a wreck. Ever since we were kids."

"Ever since Dennis," I'd said it before I realized it wasn't my business.

"What?" Sam's face seemed to cave in. "What the hell do you think you know?"

"But it wasn't his fault! I—Marcus told me what happened, he was just a kid," I looked over to see Sam's parents talking to the cops. "Your parents never should have blamed him."

"Whoa, Sil! Of course it wasn't Marcus' fault! Dennis fell down a well. My parent's never blamed

him! Marcus wasn't even there."

"I—I don't understand." My head was spinning. I began to feel sick and I grabbed onto Sam's shoulder to steady myself.

"What the hell, Sil? I think you need to go home." He pushed me off and turned away, walking back to the porch to join his parents.

I staggered away from their house holding my head. This wasn't right. This couldn't be. Everything Marcus said was convincing, everything fit. I mean, Jesus, I could see the dragons!

I made it home. I still felt sick and my brain was spewing out question after question to no avail. I tried to think of answers but every one of them stumped me. Had anything Marcus said been real? Had he tricked me into seeing the dragons? I didn't know at all and I tried to think of something that could provide answers.

I got onto my computer and did a Google search—"mysterious objects over Brevard." Nothing, not even UFO sightings. I slammed my fists on the keyboard and felt the tears. I'd spent one night with someone, one night with a person who actually made me feel a little better and what happens? He's crazy. He's psycho. He laces cigarettes with meth and gives them to unsuspecting teenage girls.

I pushed away from my desk and grabbed my blanket to pull over myself. The worst part was I had actually liked Marcus. He saw dragons, he didn't care about stupid high school parties, and he talked to me. He told me his secret—or what I had thought was his secret. I felt betrayed.

I went into town a week later. I knew about a home there, called Sunny Brooks. I didn't really know what I was going to do, but I wanted answers. I'd spent most of the previous week trying to find out about the dragons, but after endless searching there was still nothing. I'd given up on that. They weren't real. But Marcus was, and I had to know who he really was. Sam wasn't going to tell me, so it had to be Sunny Brooks.

The outside of the building was crumbling brick. There were bars on the windows and the sign

needed painting. I couldn't imagine living in a place like this. I pushed through the large glass doors into a foyer with a large oriental rug. There was a desk in the center of the foyer with a silver bell on the counter. I approached but no one was there. I rang the bell a few times, nothing.

Jesus, I thought. Not a lot of security here.

I rang the bell again, but I was convinced no one was coming. I slipped behind the desk, maybe they had a record of patients or something. I double clicked on the computer and a password screen popped up. *Really?* I guess I had expected it to be easier.

I heard the click of a doorjamb and jumped from behind the desk. Down the hall to my left I saw a woman approaching with a clipboard. She was reading something—hadn't even looked up.

"Hello?" I called.

She raised her eyes, her brow furrowing. She came around the desk and faced me, placing the clipboard by the computer keyboard. Finally she said, "Can I help you?"

"Ah, yes," I took a deep breath. "I was wondering if you could check patient records for someone?"

She looked me up and down. "Are you a family member?"

No. "Yes."

"Are you eighteen?"

Next month. "Yes, last month."

"Do you have an I.D.?"

I feigned checking my pockets. "It should be right here—Shoot. I left it at home. I'm not used to carrying it yet."

The woman's eyes narrowed. "I'm afraid I can't—"

"Please, I just, I need to know if he left anything here, if he..." I put my hands on the counter, they were starting to shake. I took a deep breath. "I just need to know if Marcus Ritter was here."

"But I thought you said—Ritter? The boy that's missing? Who are you?" The woman's hand was

hovering over the desk phone.

I was holding onto the counter's edge tightly now. I felt a little sick being here, and I was losing control of the situation. "I—I'm not related—"

"Well then I can't—"

"Please! I just need to know if he was here! I met him the other day, right before he disappeared and... I just need to know if this is where he was living before." I met her eyes.

The woman stared at me. She removed her hand from the phone. "I can't. It's a part of a police investigation now."

I felt the tears in my eyes. Real tears, again. I just needed to know. And I couldn't convince her. "Fine."

I turned away, moving swiftly towards the door.

"Wait!"

I stopped, my hand on the glass door.

"Yes. Yes, he was here. But that's it. That's all."

My breath was slow. I tried to say something, but I couldn't speak. He had been here. He was crazy. And now he was missing.

I left the building. It was all a lie.

On the night of February the fourth approximately six months after Marcus went missing, I saw him. He came walking up the sidewalk while I was leaned against the side of my house smoking. At first glance I thought he was a homeless person. He had on a long overcoat and a floppy hat. But he stopped, standing in front of my house, and took out a cigarette. As he lit the tip, the flash from the lighter illuminated his face. I felt a surging joy when I saw him. I knew I should have been wary, but I immediately ran

through the yard and embraced him. I knocked his cigarette out of his mouth on impact and he made a low grunting noise.

“Marcus!”

“Sil, dear. That was a waste of a smoke.”

I pulled away from him and took a cigarette out of my pack, sticking it between his lips. He stared at me. He didn’t look any different. He didn’t look like he’d been missing for six months. And he sure as hell didn’t look like he was crazy.

“Where have you been?”

“With the dragons.”

I felt an aching in my gut. I remembered everything Sam said and everything I’d felt the day Marcus went missing. I remembered the crushing reality at Sunny Brooks. He was crazy.

“No, Marcus, where have you really been?”

“Sil, I don’t understand.”

“You haven’t been with the dragons. You’ve been missing. The police have been looking for you. They thought you were dead.”

“But I have been. We’ve been all over the state. They are marvelous creatures, Sil. They fly everywhere. They circle and they watch us. That’s what they’re doing here, Sil, studying us.”

I felt my eyes tear up in anger. “No, no, Marcus. It’s not true. You’re wrong. You’ve just been off of your meds and you’ve been seeing things.”

“What?”

I looked up at him, pleading. He was horrified. His face was twisted into a grimace and his eyes pulsed. For the first time I noticed their green tint. Green like sour grapes. He looked at me sadly.

“Marcus—I—Sam said that—”

“Whatever Sam said was contrived by my parents. I love my brother but he is their favorite. I can’t

believe you thought he was telling the truth. How could you? Did I not show you the truth? The reality? Did I not explain well enough?"

"What about Sunny Brooks?" I breathed.

He was shocked. He opened his mouth to speak but nothing came out. Finally he turned away.

I couldn't say anything. I felt the pain in my gut grow more intense and I held my side tightly.

"What about the dragons, Silvia?" He whispered.

I could feel my face burning. I just wanted him to get it, wanted him to understand that it was ok if he was crazy, I liked him just the same.

"Marcus," I pleaded. "Please, just tell me where you were; just tell me what happened, what was wrong."

"What about the dragons?"

"What happened that night? Where have you been? It's ok, I'm not mad, but I need the truth. I need you to tell me."

"What about the dragons?"

"Marcus!"

He spun to face me. "The dragons, Sil!"

"The dragons aren't real!" I yelled.

Marcus paused. His face was once again calm. He lit the cigarette that I had given him and took a long puff on it.

"They aren't," he said looking down at me. He pointed skyward. "And yet..."

I looked up. The thin membrane of a dragon's tail snaked across the sky in shimmering blue and purple.



YARMOUTH

MORPHEUS '10

BY: RAY OUELLETTE

ACT I

Scene 1

A round table in the middle of a bare stage. Around the table are four mismatched women. They are gathered around a laptop.

MARY has a little meat on her bone, but is not fat. She always has a smile on her face, and is constantly laughing. When she does laugh, she laughs longer and harder than anyone else. KATHY is tall and skinny and always has a sarcastic comment. Although she is the youngest sister, many years of scowling in her childhood has caused her face to wrinkle making her appear about five years older than she actually is. JANE is the biggest sister of the four of them. She can be very blunt at times, but there is still a warm motherly feeling about her. PAT is clearly the oldest of the women, just turning sixty years old. Her hair is a dark brown, because it was just dyed. She is the most religious of the four, which makes her feel like the outsider of the family.

JANE

And here's some pictures of our Christmas last year.

PAT

Is it cold during the winter in Australia?

JANE

Cold enough for you to freeze off your tits. Too bad you three don't have tits to freeze off.

The four women laugh pretty hard at this.

But look at that tree

MARY

Laughing: It's beautiful.

PAT

And Jane, you're just glowing in the picture.

KATHY

It must be the drugs.

JANE

Or being drunk from about six glasses spiked Eggnog.

MARY

Laughing: Nothing like a little alcohol to bring in some good cheer, huh?

KATHY

Isn't that the true meaning of Christmas, presents and alcohol?

PAT

And, of course, the birth of our lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Slight Pause, as everyone looks at PAT.

JANE

Joking: You're crazy Pat. It was the spiked eggnog.

The four women laugh, as MARY gets up to pour herself a glass of wine.

MARY

It's crazy huh?

KATHy

No, Mary, it's alcohol. We just went over that.

MARY

I mean, that the four of us are in the same room, having a conversation. It's just crazy.

JANE

How long has it been?

MARY

Who knows.

KATHY

Fifteen years, three months.

The women look at Kathy.

I was just answering the question.

They laugh.

MARY

I am so happy we are able to do this.

PAT

Thank the lord.

KATHY throws back a glass of wine.

So what do we talk about after fifteen years?

Small pause.

KATHY

Well, we're getting really good at awkward silences, we can just keep that up.

They laugh again.

PAT

Grabbing the laptop: Well Jane, I just want to look through your pictures again.

JANE

Go right ahead, Pat.

MARY

Jane, I still can't believe you live in Australia.

JANE

Giggling: Oh come on, I've been living there for fifteen years.

MARY

Yeah, but it's not everyday you can talk to someone who lives on a different continent.

KATHY

How is the old "Land down under?"

JANE

It's good, it's good. But boy do I love coming to the states.

MARY

Oh Yeah?

Jane

Yeah. I need to shoot stuff.

MARY

What?

JANE

Last time I came down, about two years ago, Josh kept going out shooting. And every time, it made me nervous seeing him with his gun. He told me I would be less nervous around the gun if I went with him

one time. So I did, and I love it. It's so relaxing. You can't shoot in Australia, hunting's illegal.

MARY

Probably cause the koala bears are too cute.

JANE

Yeah, until you get a scared one stuck in your cellar. Then you're in all types of trouble. Then you wish you had your shotgun to shoot the little devil's brains out.

PAT

Oh my God, Jane. You actually kill living things?

JANE

Yeah, that's the point of hunting.

PAT

But God said "thou shall not kill."

JANE

Laughing: God said a lot of things. Besides. If I'm going to hell, it's not because I killed a couple of deer in a field. Lord knows I've done plenty of other things that will bite me in the ass when I'm dead.

PAT

Jane, I pray that...

KATHY

Interrupting: So wait, your sons gave you a gun. Do they know about your bi-polar tendencies?

MARY

Kathy!

JANE

If it's not diagnosed, then there's no problem.

KATHY

Jane, you were the only person I knew who could go from crying, to kicking some guy's ass, to crying all over again for no reason. You change moods so damn fast. Your sons let you hold a gun?

JANE

Beaming: And shoot them too. When we arrived at the states, Me, Sean and Josh went for a hunting trip. We shot at deer, pheasant, turkeys.

KATHY

Family members.

JANE

What?

MARY

Nothing.

JANE

I really hope that the four of us can go hunting someday.

MARY

That would be nice. It would be great if we could do more things as sisters.

KATHY

Cause nothing says sisterhood like shooting small animals.

They laugh.

PAT

I just can't get over how beautiful these pictures are.

JANE

Thanks Pat.

MARY

You know, Pat. Jane posts all of her pictures on Facebook.

PAT

What's that?

JANE

Facebook. It's a website where people can talk to each other and keep in contact.

KATHY

Yeah. Me and Mary use it to talk to Jane in Austrailia and Bill in New York.

PAT

How is he?

KATHY

I don't really talk to him.

PAT

Oh.

JANE

But yeah Pat, I post all of my pictures constantly. So does Josh and Shawn. You would be able to see them whenever you want.

MARY

And it would be easier to talk to you.

KATHY

Especially with you not having a cell phone.

PAT

I might look into it, maybe Matt can make me an account, but you know me. I've never been one for technology. I'm stuck in my ways.

KATHY

I still can't believe you don't own a cell phone, Pat.

PAT

I've done pretty well without one.

JANE

Well what if Matt got hurt, or murdered, or raped? And the hospital was trying to get hold of you and you weren't at your house to pick up?

PAT

Matt's so busy with school he only calls when he wants money, and I really don't want to talk to him if that's the case.

The four women laugh.

MARY

But Jane does bring up a good point. What if Matt did have something happen to him? How would be able to contact you if you weren't home?

PAT

Mary, nothing bad will happen as long as Jesus is protecting my family.

KATHY

Is that really realistic? I mean, why would we have health insurance, if everyone can believe in Jesus.

PAT

It's worked well so far. Matt never needed to go to the hospital before.

KATHY

That doesn't mean it can't happen.

PAT

I don't think that's enough reason for me to get a cell phone.

MARY

Interrupting: Kathy, you know Pat. If she's set in her ways, she's set in her ways.

The women laugh except for KATHY, who is still a little irritated with PAT. PAT stands up.

PAT

Can someone show me where the bathroom is?

JANE

I can. I want to get the wine I brought over anyway.

MARY

You remember where it is?

JANE

Yep, we'll be right back.

KATHY

Take your time.

JANE and PAT leave the table.

I'm going to kill her, Mary.

MARY

Kathy, calm down.

KATHY

I was expecting four people at this table tonight. If Jesus was going to be a permanent guest, I would of gotten another seat.

MARY

Kathy, I know that Pat's religious beliefs are a little more extreme than we're used to.

KATHY

She referenced God at least seven times since she's been here! How long was she sitting at the table?

MARY

Sigh: About fifteen minutes.

KATHY

The woman's nuts! I don't have to put up with this.

MARY

Kathy, stop it!

KATHY

But Pat's...

MARY

We only get to see Pat once a year and you know how lucky we can see Jane at all.

KATHY

Reluctantly: Yeah, that's true.

MARY

The four of us haven't met in fifteen years, Kathy!

KATHY

I know.

MARY

We can put up with each other for one night.

KATHY

Okay, Mary.

MARY

Thank you.

KATHY

But if she brings up Dad.

MARY

We'll cross that bridge when we get there.

PAT and JANE comes walking out, with a bottle of wine.

Thank God, more booze.

KATHY

This almost makes up for putting up with the three of you.

JANE and PAT laugh as MARY sends her an angry glance.

JANE

Oh Kathy, you're too much.

JANE pours herself a glass of wine and finishes it right away as the other women just watch her in astonishment.

PAT

Trying to continue conversation: So how are the kids Mary?

MARY

They are all doing great. Sarah is working at a deli about twenty minutes away. She is working for her teaching degree, too.

PAT

I didn't know she wanted to be a teacher!

MARY

Yep, she loves it!

JANE

Hopefully she won't be like one of those skanky American teachers you hear so much about.

MARY

What do you mean?

JANE

You know, all those teachers getting arrested for sleeping with their students. Giving a new meaning to "extra credit." It's sad.

MARY

She wants to teach Kindergarten, Jane.

JANE

It's a sick world out there, Mary.

The other three women do not what to say.

MARY

Gabe's doing well as well.

JANE

Gabe?

MaRY

Sarah's husband.

JANE

Sarah got married!?!

MARY

Oh. Yeah, three years ago. I'm sorry I thought you knew.

JANE

I had no idea.

KATHY

Apparently small town weddings don't make the news overseas.

JANE

My god. You tell Sarah that she'll be getting a wedding gift from her Aunt Jane in the mail within a month.

MARY

Oh Jane, you don't have to.

JANE

Yes I do. What kind of aunt would I be if I can't even get my niece a gift for her own wedding?

KATHY

Well figuring that her wedding was three years ago, a crazy one.

The four women laugh.

PAT

And how's Rob?

MARY

He's great.

PAT

He's in school still?

MARY

Yep, he's in college at Boston University, studying about how to become a sportscaster. And little Kate is still at school. Waitressing on the side, and looking at colleges right now.

PAT

That's great Mary, you really raised some great children.

MARY

Thanks.

PAT

And how are Shawn and Josh, Jane?

JANE

They're fine, they're fine. Don't see them too much because of their girlfriends, but they're fine. They're good boys, and seems like they'll be settling down. Not needing their Mom anymore.

MARY

Yeah, isn't that sad thinking about it?

JANE

Hell no! All the money I can save, and then spending my days watching television with a glass of wine. It's like permanent vacation!

The four women laugh hysterically at this.

MARY

Seems like they're doing pretty well for themselves then.

JANE

Yes, they're great boys. With good heads on their shoulders. How about you Pat, how is Matt?

PAT

Matt's doing great. He's doing really well in college. He just love it.

JANE

Where does he go again?

PAT

A small school in Wisconsin.

JANE

Wisconsin? Why is he going to school in such a piece of shit state?

KATHY

Matt is the only person I know who actually chooses to go to school in Wisconsin. Not even people in Wisconsin want to go to school in Wisconsin.

PAT

But he loves it there. He's making lots of friends. Joined a fraternity. He's doing his theater stuff, he loves it. Only one more year till he's done though.

MARY

Let him know that we're all thinking of him over here.

KATHY

Yeah, its been way too long since we last saw him.

PAT

I will. He's doing great. Thank the lord, that he's doing great.

KATHY gives MARY another glance.

MARY

Let him know that we're all thinking of him over here.

KATHY

Yeah, its been way too long since we last saw him.

PAT

I will. He's doing great. Thank the lord, that he's doing great.

KATHY gives MARY a glance.

JANE

I can't believe that all of our kids are so grown up.

MARY

It's amazing.

JANE

Do you ever look at your kid, and remember what they were like when they were just a baby?

PAT

All the time.

MARY

I always cry when I do, because you never could have believed how great your child's life would turn out.

PAT

It's a miracle really.

KATHY

Yep, you all have great kids.

JANE

Yes, nothing can beat the sheer joy of being a real Mom.

MARY

Realizing where this conversation is going and getting uncomfortable: True...

JANE

I mean, as a woman, there is no greater gift than being able to be a Mother. You will never know true happiness till you can raise a child as your own.

KATHY looks down as PAT and MARY look at her.

MARY

Jane, would you like some more wine?

JANE

Sure, pour me up.

MARY pours JANE another glass of wine.

MARY

Noticing that Kathy is getting a little upset because of this conversation: But you know Jane, Kathy here has helped me raise my three kids like they were her very own. They think of her as their second Mom.

PAT

They really do, Kathy. Every time I come down here to visit, I always see Katie sticking to you like glue. Or Sarah over at your house, gossiping over something that happened. They really love you.

MARY

They really do.

KATHY

Touched: Thanks.

JANE

That's great Kathy.

Awkward Silence.

So, Kathy. Pat told me that you lost your job as a waitress because you're too old.

The awkward silence gets even more awkward as each woman looks at JANE, not believing she just said what she did.

KATHY

Slowly Yeah, that's true Jane.

PAT

I'm sorry Kathy. It's just that I called Jane one time, and she asked me how you were, and I was upset because I just heard the news-

KATHY

Interrupting: It's okay, I'm not mad.

JANE

So what happened?

KATHY

Well, my boss called me, drunk. And he said “Hey, look, lets cut the chase. We both know it’s not working.”

JANE

Really?

KATHY

Yeah. So I told him that I have no idea what he’s talking about, and then he told me that we both know I’m getting too old to be a waitress. So he gave me two weeks till he told me to find a new job.

JANE

Oh my God!

MARY

The guy’s an asshole.

PAT

Yeah, you should sue him Kathy.

KATHY

I was actually looking into that.

JANE

Do you use makeup?

Again, all three women look at JANE.

KATHY

What?

JANE

Do you use make up when you go to work? I mean, I find that makeup makes me look younger.

KATHY

You don’t say.

JANE

Maybe if you put some makeup on before you went to work you wouldn’t look so old.

KATHY

Trying not to show her anger: I’ll remember that, thanks Jane.

JANE

What you should do is put some makeup on, go to your boss, and let him see that you don’t have to look as

old as your are, and then...

PAT

Interrupting: So Kathy, are you looking for another job?

KATHY

Nope. I figured I would just live off the unemployment for a while.

PAT

This makes Pat a little upset: You're living off your unemployment?

KATHY

Yeah, I decided that I need a little time to relax.

Pat

Can unemployment really support you in the long run?

KATHY

Well no, but when my lawsuit comes back, then I won't have to worry about it.

PAT

Matter of fact tone: That doesn't seem like a smart plan.

KATHY

It's enough money to survive comfortably.

PAT

Yeah but the way the economy is, that's going to run out soon. The best thing for you to do is look for a job, and guarantee yourself a paycheck every week.

KATHY

Yeah. The way the economy is, the first thing that every employer is looking for is a fifty year old woman without a college degree.

PAT

Well Kathy if you pray about it, then the lord will help you.

KATHY

Sharply: I don't think I have the time to, Pat.

MARY

Interrupting: But the guy was still a huge asshole for firing Kathy over her age. That has to be against the law.

PAT

Yeah, isn't that ageism?

KATHY

I think so.

PAT

I saw it in the news. People discriminated because of their age in their work place. They made a lot of money in lawsuits.

KATHY

Yeah?

PAT

Yeah. You might be able to get rich from being fired.

MARY

Man, if that was the case, I wish my boss would call me old.

The three women start to laugh as JANE takes out a small container and hands it over to KATHY.

KATHY

What's this?

JANE

It's Wrinkle Remover Cream. Made in Austraila, it uses the dirt from some mountain, I believe.

The three women just look at the container, not believing that JANE is handing it to her.

But yeah, just rub the cream over your wrinkles and they'll go away in weeks. Well maybe months, they're pretty defined.

MARY and PAT try to look away as the conversation gets more awkward.

Especially get it around the eyes. You always look like you just woke up. Did anyone ever tell you that? Oh and around your lips, maybe you won't look like your frowning so much.

Nobody says anything for several seconds.

You can keep it.

Another slight uncomfortable pause.

KATHY

...Thanks.

JANE

Maybe that will make your complexion look better too, since your skin looks like it's pale and dead, I also have some products for your hair, that might help...

MARY

Finally interrupting: Lets change the subject.

PAT

How's Dad?

The three women look at PAT, each one uncomfortable with the new subject.

KATHY

Why would you ask that?

PAT

I was just changing the subject.

KATHY

You know we don't talk to him, Pat.

MARY

We haven't for about two years.

KATHY

Why would you ask us how he is, huh?

PAT

Come on, Kathy.

KATHY

You talk to him more than we do, why don't you tell us how he is?

PAT

How do you think that makes me feel, huh? That I'm the only family member who still talks to him.

KATHY

Well good for you, then. That is the Christian thing to do, right?

PAT

You two live about ten minutes away from him, and you don't even call him.

MARY

Now hold on, Pat. How can we visit the man?

KATHY

You don't have to explain our actions to her.

PAT

What, is it too much for his own daughters to show compassion for the man? He's about 90.

KATHY

Oh quit judging us, Pat. We're not evil people, we're not sinners, we're human.

MARY

How can I show compassion for that man, Pat? After what he did to us.

KATHY

How can we even talk to the man, if we still can't talk about it with each other.

PAT

Maybe we don't need to.

KATHY

What?

PAT

The Lord preaches forgiveness.

MARY

What?

JANE

Oh knock off the religious bullshit. The man was a horrible person.

PAT

That's our Dad!

JANE

What kind of Dad beats up his kids?. He got too drunk, and than he hit us. He beat the shit out of us.

PAT

We don't need to talk about it.

MARY

Yes we do.

KATHY

How can I forgive him?

KATHY puts out her arm, and lifts up her sleeve.

I still have the scar from the cigarette burn. One time Kate asked me what my scar was from, I had to lie. She starts to tear up. I can't even be honest about my own damn childhood, he took that away from me. I

can't forgive him, and you want me to talk to him? How dare you.

PAT

Life was hard back then. He had to watch 8 kids, and Mom died early. He had stress.

MARY

Close to Tears: Stop it Pat! He didn't have to take it out on us! We were just kids.

JANE

I hope the man dies.

PAT

Jane!

JANE

I was okay with the hitting, I could get over that.

KAREETHY

What do you mean?

Long pause, the three women look at JANE.

MARY

Jane?

KATHY

What happened Jane?

JANE looks up with heavy tears in her eyes.

JANE

He touched me. That sick man touched me.

The three women look at JANE, not knowing what to say. Finally, MARY gets up to give JANE a hug. JANE starts to break down as MARY continues to hold her. KATHY and PAT don't know what to say.

KATHY

I had no idea, I am so sorry you had to go through that. That you still have to through that now.

JANE

The man was sick. There was no reason for that. I want him to die. I told him. I told him as soon as I left the house, if he tried to talk to me, I would kill him.

KATHY

How can she forgive him for that, Pat?

Slight Pause, PAT hits the table.

PAT

Stop talking to me like I didn't go through what you guys went through. I was beaten up too. I was the oldest. Whenever something around the house went wrong, I was blamed. If dinner wasn't ready, if his clothes weren't washed, I would get hit. Stop talking like I don't know what you all went through.

JANE

So how can you still talk to that man?

PAT

Because I used to hate him. Every day, I would think about what he did, and I would hate him more and more. But you know what, that hatred did nothing. It just left me empty inside. I would just get more and more sad. And then I found God. And you know what the first thing He did was? He gave me the strength and power to forgive Dad. I got rid of my hatred, and I no longer felt empty.

JANE

That is the biggest piece of garbage I ever heard.

PAT

Ignoring Jane: I know you all are skeptical of my religious beliefs, and we will never see eye to eye on them. But I just want you to know that I have never felt happier till I was able to forgive Dad. I knew that I couldn't get through life hating him. So not only did I forgive him, but now I love him too. And I have never been happier.

MARY

Sincerely: I'm happy for you. I honestly wish I had the strength to forgive him.

PAT

You can Mary! All you need to do is go to Jesus, and he will help you. And I pray that the Lord will come to you and give you strength to forgive Dad, like I did.

KATHY

Enough. I can't deal with this anymore, Pat!

PAT

Kathy?

KATHY

Every time you come here, you bring up prayers and testimonies. But I will not sit here and allow you to use religion to judge the rest of us.

MARY

Kathy, please.

KATHY

If your relationship with God has helped you that much, then I am happy for you, I sincerely am. But I will not let you preach to me about how I should be close to God. I am a grown woman, Pat. I can make my own religious decisions.

PAT

I'm just want you to all be as happy as I am.

KATHY

I'll be a lot happier if you keep your religion to yourself.

PAT

I rebuke you in the name of Jesus.

KATHY

I don't care. The whole thing is phony, Pat.

MARY

Kathy!

KATHY

I don't care how strong your religious faith is, there is no way you can forgive that man for everything that he did to us. That's complete bullshit.

MARY

Shut up, Kathy!

KATHY

I am done having her shove her religion down our throats.

MARY

I did not wait fifteen years to have a conversation with my sisters to have it ruined by some ridiculous conversation about religion. You should not yell at Pat for her beliefs. She was just saying her beliefs, not forcing religion.

KATHY

She's judging us because she thinks she's a better Christian.

PAT

I am not!

JANE

Remember that one time that Pat took a permanent marker and drew horns on Kate and called her the "Spawn of Satan."

The three women look at JANE, bewildered.

PAT

I didn't do that.

JANE

Yes you did, I remember you telling me about it.

PAT

I would never do that to Kate.

MARY

Yeah, I don't ever remember that happening.

JANE

Yeah, Pat you told me about how you called Kate the "Spawn of Satan," just like Mary's other kids.

MARY

Excuse me?

PAT

I never said that, Mary.

JANE

Yeah you did.

MARY

My children are the "Spawn of Satan", Pat?

PAT

Mary, I would never call your children that.

MARY stays silent, not knowing what to think.

Mary, please believe me!

MARY

I am done defending you Pat.

KATHY

You don't have to be here with us sinners if you don't want to. Get off your damn pedestal, and stop judging us.

PAT

Excuse me, you want to yell at me for judging you? You two are the ones who won't talk to my husband.

JANE

They won't talk to Ron? Why?

PAT

Because he doesn't meet their standards.

KATHY

He used your credit card to look at internet porn.

MARY

He did charge about \$500. That's a lot Pat.

PAT

You have no right to judge our marriage, or him.

KATHY

You even left him!

PAT

For a day, I needed to clear my head. I don't have to defend him or myself to you two.

MARY

I don't want my children to talk to him if he's like that. I really don't, Pat.

PAT

He's my husband! He is not a criminal!

KATHY

I'm surprised Matt didn't pick that up from him yet. I mean, he's already picked up the drinking, didn't he?

PAT

Stop talking about Matt.

MARY

Pat, he almost got kicked out of school his first year for drinking too much.

KATHY

Don't you think you should be preaching religion to your son instead of preaching it to your two sisters? He's the one that was almost expelled.

JANE

Hey! I don't care what we fight about, but I will not have you bringing the children up, Kathy. That's not right.

PAT

That's what they do, Jane. They don't care who they have to hurt to prove a point.

MARY

Shut up, Pat.

PAT

They bring up Shawn.

JANE

My Shawn?

PAT

Yes.

MARY

Shut up!

KATHY

Stop it Pat!

JANE

What do they say?

PAT

How he's screwed up his life. How horrible it is that he's gotten involved with drugs. How he doesn't even have a job, and he's probably just using the money that you've been giving him to buy cigarettes and alcohol.

JANE

You're questioning my parenting?

MARY

Jane, we still love you and Shawn.

JANE

You two have no right to talk about my son like that!

KATHY

Well what else can we do? You're too irrational to talk to about anything that involves you or your family.

JANE

So you talk about me behind my back.

MARY

It's not like that.

JANE

Shut up Mary!

PAT

That's what they do, Jane. As soon as someone doesn't meet their standards, they just reject them, and criticize them, and stop talking to them.

MARY

Close to tears: No we don't!

PAT

They did it to Bill. Our own brother!

KATHY

Hey, we gave him plenty of options. We offered to pay for him to go to rehab, we tried to get him to support groups. But he kept drinking.

PAT

He was an alcoholic. He needs help!

JANE

And alcoholism can run in the family.

KATHY

Alcoholism does not run in the family. Billy was the exception. We would not let him bring us down with him.

PAT

I can't believe you both feel that way.

MARY

Reluctantly: That wasn't my decision.

KATHY

What?

MARY

I never wanted to disassociate from Bill, you did. I should of put my foot down. But I didn't.

KATHY

So you bring it up now?

MARY

I don't think it's right what we're doing. We need to reach out to him.

KATHY

No we don't! We've done that enough. He's made his own decisions. He has to deal with the consequences.

PAT

So that's it?

JANE

We're just going to let him die?

KATHY

He's letting himself die! I will not watch him do it anymore.

PAT

You're horrible.

KATHY

Do not act like I don't love the man. I do. I love him as much as you do. Hell, he's my brother. But I will not watch him hurt himself. I will not watch someone I love kill himself. It's too hard.

MARY

But you're now letting him kill himself.

KATHY

Would you really want the kids to see him like that, Mary?

MARY

Don't put this on the kids, Kathy. Just because you're afraid of facing this, does not mean that I have to go along with it. You always do this. If you disagree with something, you need everyone to disagree with it too.

KATHY

That's not true.

MARY

I love you Kathy, I really do, but I'm done with always agreeing with you.

KATHY

So you're blaming me for all your decisions.

MARY

No I'm not.

KATHY

Grow the hell up, Mary.

PAT

Leave her alone! You were always yelling at her for no reason, when she just tried to help you.

KATHY

Mind your own business.

PAT

Let's see how much everyone helps you when your unemployment runs out.

MARY

You want me to grow up when you're relying on government handouts.

PAT

You should be looking for a job. You are about fifty years old, what is wrong with you?

KATHY

Shut up!

PAT

Again, I rebuke you in the name of Jesus...

JANE

Lay off it Pat.

PAT

I can pray if I want to.

KATHY

You can also leave the house.

MARY

This is my damn house Kathy, I'll make the rules!

JANE

About time you took charge of your house Mary.

KATHY

If only you could do the same thing with your kid.

JANE

You bitch!

MARY

Kathy! How can you say that when you don't even know how hard it is to have kids.

PAT

Yeah, who the hell are you to judge any of our parenting?

MARY

Right, and who the hell are you to judge us of our religious decision?

PAT

The Lord will eventually judge all of you.

KATHY

Good let him do it, so you can stop fucking doing it.

JANE

Leave her alone.

PAT

Why do you two even talk to us? Just talk behind our backs like with everyone else you hate.

KATHY

I'd gladly do that, if Mary wouldn't insist that we invite you every year.

MARY

Oh don't worry, I won't do that anymore!

PAT

Good.

KATHY

Fantastic!

MARY

Wonderful. And Kathy, I don't want to see you anymore either.

KATHY

Not a problem.

MARY

And Jane, if you don't leave soon, I may get my own gun and shoot you.

JANE

You bitch.

MARY

So thank you all for coming, and I hope you all go to hell!

KATHY

Fuck you!

PAT

Shut up!

MARY

Go to Hell!

At this JANE takes her bottle of wine, and throws it in anger across the other side of the table. The three women duck and watch the bottle as it comes to the floor and crashes into a thousand little pieces. The four women look at the glass, stunned at what just happened. All of a sudden a phone rings offstage. The four women look up as MARY slowly walks offstage to answer the phone. As the phone conversation happens offstage, the four women don't speak. They continue to look at each other and the glass on the floor.

MARY

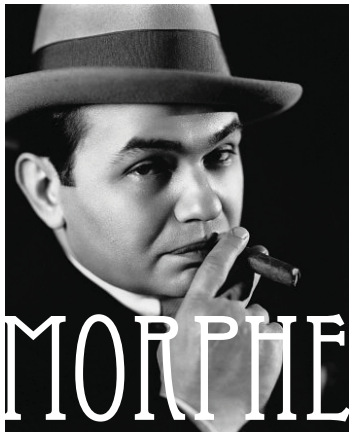
Offstage: Hello?...Oh, Ron...Yes, she's here. Do you need to...What?...Oh my God...Yes, of course...I'll go get her now.

MARY walks back onstage with a look of panic on her face.

Pat, it's Ron. Matt just got into a car accident. He's at the hospital.

MARY

The three women look up as PAT rushes offstage with MARY. The lights onstage fade to black, except for one light that focuses on the broken glass onstage. Eventually the stage is completely black.



LOST_{IN} BETWEEN

MORPHEUS '10

BY: MILES YETTER

The day began as had every day. Little did he know that life would begin to change and a new girl and a new lie would make it different. Thomas jumped into his pants, ran his fingers through his hair like a comb, grabbed his books, and sprinted off to class. Nodding off through most of class, he thought to himself, “why am I even here?” He wondered to himself, what was his purpose in life? And, would anything change? Dreams would die each day so he stopped dreaming. Using liquor and chewing tobacco to sedate his feelings was the only way that he could forget his friends and get through the day. Forget everything. All his friends had abandoned him for one reason or another; however, he was now alone and had to start anew.

Thomas felt alone but that was soon to change. He had begun the school year as he had each year, trying to find a new group of friends. He slowly made his way into homeroom and assumed a seat next to a guy named Josh. He had known Josh for a couple of years but had never really hung out with him outside of school. They talked in homeroom about school, classes, girls. It was a good enough beginning to a conversation that he had wondered if a friendship was capable of developing. It did not take long before Thomas began to feel that he was a part of something again. Oddly enough, he came to learn that he and Josh, crazy as they seemed, attended church no less than two times a week.

It was at church that he had actually met Mona. However, by then Mona was already involved with Josh, who he was already considering his new best friend. There was no denying that Mona was beautiful and fun, so much so that he recalled feeling a vibe about her. Realizing she was now with Josh required him to sort out his feelings all over again. Whatever his feelings for Mona, it was difficult to deny Josh. So he found himself in a pattern of hanging out with them both, many times as a third wheel. Somehow it had worked, they shared many laughs together. Thomas and the merry couple became inseparable and

started doing everything together.

For his part, Thomas had somehow always managed to have a girlfriend dating back to second grade. It was as if there were never any breaks. He had jumped from girl to girl like clockwork. When one relationship ended, he fell into another. However, since he had met Mona, something was now different. He was not interested in having a woman around, though he wasn't certain why. He did find his mind drifting to visions of Mona. He could not forget the smell of her hair, or the casual way she had touched him, or frankly the way she made the world right even when things were wrong. He had no father, and a mother to whom he could not relate. For that matter, he felt no connection to his stepfather; his was a small family that almost seemed meaningless. Yes, he may have been searching for something deeper, someone that he could depend on and who understood him. He could not avoid wondering if the missing component in his pathetic life was new friend Mona. There was no denying, there was something about Mona, and Thomas found himself wondering just what it was.

Yet one Friday night he had failed to make connections with Josh and Mona. It was strange for Thomas to be in the company of friends from his prior life, not that he did not find himself thinking about Mona as the night unfolded. He was drinking and hitting it hard. They went out to explore a neighborhood bar for a while before he had returned to his house. Mona surprised him, no stunned him, with an unexpected call. She said she needed to talk to him immediately and it sounded serious. What the hell was this, she needed to get away from Josh for some reason but would not explain over the phone. All due respect to Josh, the logical place to meet was his house and he wondered if it was clean enough (he had never cared before now). She was on his doorstep within the hour.

She arrived looking more stunning than ever, with her autumn hair shimmering. She was dressed in a black tank top with jeans which revealed every curve of her body. She had arrived asking to go somewhere private to talk. He escorted her into the bedroom where she began to tell her story. Then she had trouble for a spell getting her story out.

Thomas was afraid to really ask her any questions. He asked hesitantly, "What's wrong? You're acting weird." He knew from her eyes that something wasn't right.

Mona struggled before she began, "It's just Josh, he hasn't been treating me right, Thomas." As tears welled up in her eyes, she seemed to have difficulty choosing her words.

Thomas was afraid to learn more before he finally blurted out, "What the hell did he do?" Mona approached the subject reluctantly knowing that she could confide in Thomas.

Mona hesitated again this time while tears began flowing down her face. She whispered softly afraid of the consequences, "He... he hit me... he got mad at me and he hit me..."

Thomas was shocked by what he was hearing. He had not always been kind to women, but what Mona was describing was a whole new ballgame. He was no longer hesitant, "What? Why would he hit you?"

Mona now spoke at a whisper, "Well I told him I wasn't going to have sex with him as he has been a downer lately, critical of everything I do. As I noted that I was not in mood to be romantic with him, he came out of the bathroom, then he pushed me down and he hit me." Everything changed with Josh after we had sex; it is as if that's all that matters now. I feel like I'm just a piece of meat to him. He expects it from me now. Everything has changed and I hate being around him. I am afraid of him but never thought he would hit me."

Thomas was still stunned by the shocking news of the person who was now his best friend. He could not get the picture out of his head what Josh had done to her. He could see the marks on her face and the finger prints on her arms where he held her down.

Until this moment, Josh had seemed like a good guy. He was the one that had got him to go to church again. Thomas was trying to understand how this could happen, so he asked, "Why would he hit you? You're the best thing that's happened to him, you're the greatest. I just can't believe this. I can't believe what I am hearing."

Mona confided in Thomas, "I know but it's just going bad ever since we went all the way; he thinks I am just there to please him. Thomas, I need advice, I don't know what to do. I gave my virginity up to him." Bang, there it was, like a hammer to his forehead.

Trying to regain his composure while digesting the alcohol he had consumed, Thomas wondered what he should do to help in this situation. This was foreign territory to Thomas. He tried his best to suppress the thought that this terrible situation might in fact present an opportunity. "Well you need to get rid of him; you don't need a guy like that in your life trying to control you all the time and using you. If it's

like this now it will only get worse.”

Mona replied quickly, “I know, I’m just worried what he will do to me if I dump him. I’m so scared, and I have nowhere to turn or any place that he will not find me.”

The reality was swirling around in his head. Thomas knew that he was required to stand up to Josh on behalf of Mona. Thomas tried to calm her, “I’ll be there for you. I can’t stand anyone that would touch a girl. I just never thought it would be Josh. You must move on to the next stage of your life and find someone that treats you right.”

Mona moved close to Thomas, “You know you’re right. My mom said I should go for a guy like you, but I just need some time to get over Josh. I just want to not be scared anymore or even worry about him. I’m hoping that you could help me do that.”

Thomas never felt more certain of his own decency in his life, “Well I’ll be there for you, you’re so special, anyone ever told you that? Anybody would be lucky to have you I’m just glad that I can be there for you.”

Mona was relieved that Thomas was willing to help her in this awkward situation. She viewed Thomas and Josh as best friends. Her approach to Thomas likely ended that friendship. Comforted by the reaction of Thomas, she calmly shared her relief, “Oh Thomas, you’re so sweet I’m so lucky to have someone like you. I think I will be able to explain things to Josh. I’m just glad to have you. You are the one that was always there for me.”

Thomas felt something change inside him in an instant. His beer muddle was lifting in the seriousness of the moment. In Mona, he felt he had someone he could be with for a long time. He needed to be sure he wasn’t getting ahead of himself. By the way in which she had turned to him in her hour of need, he felt a connection to another person like never before. Her language made him feel she was also capable of being there for him, too. As he further analyzed the situation, Thomas began to see this awkward situation as a blessing in disguise. Josh’s mistake would be his gain. The lady with whom he had just been friends, but had secretly hoped would be his, had come to him in crisis. He knew that he would do anything in his power to be there for her.

Mona now knew that she had successfully manipulated Thomas. He had reacted in just the manner

that she hoped and expected. She had liked him when she met him through Josh. She hoped that one day they could be together but Josh and Thomas were such good friends. Mona whispered in his ear, "I think that you're the guy that I need right now and that I've needed for a long time." Mona leaned closer to him as they now snuggled on the bed, as they held each other in a big embrace. Now was the time only for comforting, nothing else. There wasn't much talking after that and he saw her home at 3:00 AM. What a strange night?

Despite the late hour, Mona woke up with a purpose. In Thomas, she had someone who wanted her for the right reasons. She was struck by how safe she felt in his arms before her thoughts turned to her next mission, figuring out how to break up with Josh. He deserved no better, but it was still not going to be easy. Josh could be stubborn and difficult. She knew she had to call him to ask for a meeting. How many times had she heard Josh say, kidding, "If someone is going to shoot me, it will be in the face." The irony struck her as she looked ahead to the meeting she hoped would be soon.

They agreed to meet at Josh's house, the same place where the damage was done. She reached his house knowing that this would probably be the last time she would need to worry about Josh or even think about how he might react to her. He was expecting her when she arrived. Josh seemed nervous as he opened the door to her. Mona was on a mission, "Josh, I need to talk to you."

Despite the guilt he had felt all night long, even Josh was surprised when he acted as if nothing was wrong and in a matter of fact way, "Well what is it? Are you going to break up with me like you did Dustin? I'm sorry. I know what I did what was wrong but please do not break up with me. It appears you just like to hop from one guy to the next." Even he was surprised by what had come from his mouth.

Mona was not only surprised by the tact that Josh chose, but more so by her reaction to it. Suddenly she erupted in tears, wondering if Josh knew that she had turned to his friend Thomas as she once had turned to him when she had broken up with Dustin. In view of the circumstances, it was strange that she had let such thoughts enter her mind.

She decided to stay on task, "Josh, what did you expect? You hit me. What do you expect me to do? Like really Josh, you hurt me. Why are bringing Dustin into this anyway? This isn't about Dustin. You know I left him for you."

Josh felt lower than a stray dog as it did in fact hit him that Mona had turned to Thomas after the

incident (Mona had read the situation right whether she knew it or not). “Mona, I just didn’t expect this from you. You know that I never meant to hurt you. But, you need to be more committed to your guy. One day you are going to end up alone. So who are you leaving me for anyway? I know you can’t just go on without having a guy.”

Mona, looking him dead in the eye, replied firmly, “What does that have anything to do with it Josh. You know Josh you make me feel worthless. I can’t keep on living with you like this. You are always paranoid that I am going to leave. However, you created the final straw yourself when you hit me.”

Josh quickly sensed that his manipulation was not working. He was used to nudging her in one direction or another. Mona seemed different this time around. Convincing her that he was sorry and to stay with him might not work after all. Maybe he had finally lost her. “I know it won’t be the same, but I don’t know what I can do now. You were everything to me. But, if you just want to leave me then go ahead and leave,” he snapped. He could not believe what he said next when he launched a “Hail Mary.” “Go ahead and get, you are not good enough for me anyway. You’re just a girl that is really nothing special.” Mona returned to crying at this attempt to turn her into the bad guy.. She had come back to him so many times but this time was different.

This time the tug at her heart was out of pity for Josh, not a desire to make him like her. His mean and feeble statements were just one final act of desperation by a desperate man who was losing control of his world. That he had had a rough childhood was no longer a good excuse. But she also knew that Josh was just trying to do anything to try and get her back. Mona decided to stay on message. “You will always have me Josh, just now as a friend and not a lover. I know that you don’t want to hear this, but this is something that I have to do. You’ll always be my first and have a special place in my heart. But I don’t feel like I can be with you anymore, I just need to move on and be by myself for once.”

Josh with his eyes shut imagined he could go back and change what he did. One moment of anger and everything had changed. He was just remembering all the good times that they had together and knew that they would never happen again. The tears started flowing down his face like Niagara Falls. He uttered to her, “You’re just going to leave me after all that we have been through and what we have meant to each other. I just don’t know what I’ll do without you. It’s like I’ve felt new things with you that I never have with anyone else and I just don’t want to lose you. And you’re going to leave me like this? Can I do

anything to make it right?"

Mona looked into his eyes, and conveyed with deep sympathy, "You'll be fine Josh, trust me. You were fine before me and you'll be fine after. I'm sorry Josh I just have to do this. I'll still be your friend Josh. You'll move on, I know it. You have so much to offer. Josh if you need anything, I mean anything, I will be there for you." With that big finish, she was exhausted.

But Josh wasn't finished. He had one more final desperate attempt to right the ship: "I can't move on though, because I still love you. I know that you'll be there for me. I just want it to be the way that it was."

Mona knew that no matter what she said it would not be what he would want to hear. She tried her best to make everything seem fine, because that was simply her nature. She made one last attempt at peace, "I love you too, I need to do this for myself though, Josh. There's nothing left for us and I just need to move on."

Josh responded by flashing his true anger, "Well fine, fuck you. I'll be fine without you."

Mona still displayed her determination to end things on the right note when she replied "I'll just never forget that night. I know that you never meant to do anything Josh."

The ping pong match in his head dictated Josh's next response, "Me either, I'm such an idiot. Please, just take some time to think about everything. I know that you have to do what you think is right. I just don't want you to rush into anything."

Mona was by now through, "I'll think about it Josh but I got to go. Call me though, to make sure everything is all right."

Josh can't even think straight when he cries, "I will Mona. I'm so sorry."

Mona, as she moves to depart, answers a final time, "It's ok Josh. I got to go. Ok?"

By now, Josh was enjoying his ability to prolong the game when he stated, "Ok. I still love you."

In the agony of the moment, Mona didn't even hear herself, "Josh..." tears flowing down her face "bye." She walked out of the door and ran to her car. She started it and sped home, the one place she knew everything would be alright. She arrived and ran straight to bed diving under the covers almost in one

motion. She felt secure there hiding from the world and her problems thinking of what had just happened.

The day turned in night as Mona laid there in sadness. Thomas had just finished dinner with his parents and wanted to see how she was doing. The phone rang and Mona picked up, and confessed "Thomas it's been the longest day."

Thomas, in a cautious tone, confided the question that had been on his mind, "So you broke up with him?"

Mona made an effort to explain everything that had happened earlier in the day with Josh, "I had to, and it just wouldn't ever be the same. It was hard though I never felt like I've ever done anything that difficult before. He just sat there crying and here I was telling him that I couldn't be with him anymore."

Thomas, "Well I'm proud of you. You did what was right for you. I know you're looking back at everything now but just know that you did what was best for you. You don't deserve that and hopefully now I can be there for you."

Mona finally was rising to the moment and began to shake off her depressed state when she uttered, "Oh Thomas, when can I come see you? I want to see you. You take all the pain away."

Thomas, who had not been certain what to expect from Mona, could hardly contain himself, "You can come tonight if you want? I mean if you think that you are ready for it. It's up to you though."

Mona was pleased with his response. Nothing had changed from the night before, "Yea, I just have to sneak out of my house... So I'll see you in an hour?"

Thomas, "Yea, I can't wait."

As the hour past slowly, minute by minute, Mona finally arrived. She knocked on the door seeing through the window that Thomas was still putting on his shirt. Thomas hurried to the door to let her in. The two shared a look and a smile. It had been an eventful day for sure. He invited her in and they sat down on the couch as if they had been together for some time.

Thomas, more nervous than he had been in his life, asked what he thought was a logical question, "So, how are you feeling?"

Mona was anxious to answer when she replied, "I feel different, like I am finally free of everything. For the first time in a long time, I feel like myself."

Convinced that he had the right prescription for her, Thomas provided what seemed like a logical response: "Well that's good. Hopefully you'll have someone that will treat you better, someone that will treat you right. I am just happy that you are free of him."

Mona moved to reassure Thomas, "Yes, I know, I feel more and more comfortable when I am with you. I just hope that you feel the same way. I think that you're the right guy for me." She moves closer and put her hands on his. Her eyelashes could tickle his cheeks.

Heart pounding, Thomas could not have been happier with her treatment of the situation. But a part of him felt an instinct to protect his heart from future heartache. From her statements, it appeared the feelings in the room were not one sided. But he had to ask, "Do you think it is too soon for this. I mean you just broke up with Josh. Don't you feel like you are rushing into thing? I just want to make sure that you are ready for this and I am not just the 'rebound' guy."

Mona took a few moments to collect herself before responding. This was the first time in her life that she wanted someone this badly and she wasn't going to fumble the moment. She chose her words carefully and spoke softly, "I'm ready if you are. I mean, Thomas, I've liked you for a while now. I just never felt free enough to tell you. Please, just promise me that you won't hurt me like Josh."

Thomas, heart still pounding, was quick with his response: "Well, that is the one thing that I can promise you. I know that you have gone through a lot but I will never hurt you. And I'll always be there for you." He grabs her head and brings it close to her and kissed her on the lips as gently as he could.

Mona spoke from the heart, "Oh Thomas, you're amazing. You make me feel so special." In what Thomas felt was the greatest night of his existence, they spent the night together in each other's arms, listening to music and treasuring the moment.

Before either of them knew it, it was Monday and that meant it was back to the real world. Thomas knew it would be a long day at school. He knew that Josh would be upset and he could not imagine how he would feel if he knew that Mona had turned to him. For reasons that made no sense to him, he felt a

certain amount of guilt over how the situation had played out. Given how Josh had treated Mona, he owed him nothing. But still, a sense of betrayal haunted him. One way to look at it, he was just trying to lend support to a friend in need when something special and unexpected had happened. He knew that Josh would never forgive him though. He thought the best idea was to just to keep quiet about it, and hope that the issue would not be raised.

He arrived in homeroom as he did every day and took his seat next to Josh. He made his best effort to simply act normal. Josh looked sad, as if something had been taken from him. Although Thomas did not give away his thoughts or feelings, Thomas could not help but thinking of what Josh had done to Mona.

That day passed by slowly. Every class seemed like an eternity and Thomas just couldn't wait to get back to her. It was as if everything else in the world had stopped. He called her as soon as he got out of school. Mona answered on the first ring, "Hey, how was your day?"

Thomas, who had revised his list of what was important in life, stated the obvious, "Good, 'cept I can't stop thinking about you and last night."

Mona shared what was on her mind, "Thomas you're so sweet let's meet up today."

To Thomas, that sounded like a great idea. He could barely conceal his excitement, "Ok, meet me at the park in twenty."

Like the mood of the moment, it was a beautiful day. Thomas had arrived first but was soon met by Mona. They immediately held hands and looked into one another's eyes. They started to walk and Thomas began talking about everything, pouring his heart out: "You know before I met you I had felt empty inside. It's like you put hope into me again. I now believe all my dreams are possible. Before this relationship, I felt all alone and no one really understood me. But, with you it's like anything is possible again. Life is simple and I feel I can always count on you."

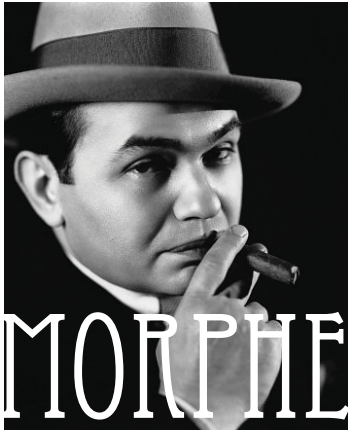
Mona was staring at the trees and the butterflies as if nothing could capture this moment better. Nature, she thought to herself, was so revealing about life and its twists and turns. As she pondered the moment, it dawned on her how nature can capture beauty even in the simplest forms. She said to Thomas,

“I know Thomas. That you were meant for me and I was meant for you. Life to me is simple and you need to be with the one that you care most about even when others are hurt by your actions.”

Thomas could not help but be overwhelmed by the moment he could only have dreamed about a few days before this fine day. He tried his best to comprehend and interpret what he was feeling. Thomas felt as if the world was moving in slow motion as if he was just an observer of the world around him. Everything seemed perfect to him for once when his eyes met Mona's.

He shared exactly what was on his mind, “Mona, I just feel like I'm at home with you more than I have ever been with anyone else. I just know that I can be myself around you and not have to act like different.”

Mona felt comfort with him too. Their lives were now interchanged and they had each other. They looked out into the sunset and held each other close. It was as if a new page had turned in their lives. No longer did either feel alone in the world. They knew that they belonged together like two jagged puzzle pieces that found each other and somehow seemed to fit. Although one friendship was forever altered, he knew that the one that had been formed would have greater meaning in his life. He knew he would face Josh with the truth in time. His only remorse was for Josh and what he lost the day he raised a hand in anger.



LARRY AND HIS BROTHERS

MORPHEUS '10

BY: JASON ALMENDINGER

The Brothers:

Larry:

He is the oldest brother, married for three years to a woman named Kelly; their relationship has steadily become stale. He is conservative, hard working and very smart. He has a PhD in philosophy from Yale, and yet he chooses to work for CAT construction. His stereotyped profession in no way reflects his character. He is a simple man, he loves his family and he loves having a job where he can use his hands, funnily enough he trusts them more than his mind. Had he been born a hundred years earlier in the old West he would have been much better off.

Christian:

The professional womanizer. Had recently separated from his wife, Dana. He resents Larry for his strict humbleness and morality. In this respect, he is the opposite of Larry. He is an unsuccessful television actor trying to break it onto the big screen. He takes two steps at a time and he wears very nice clothes though he can't quite afford them. He is constantly on his phone and nothing else in the world is quite as important as what he might be doing at any particular moment.

Pete:

He is the youngest brother; he has a difficult time following in the shadows of his two older brothers. At this point he portrays qualities of both Christian and Larry. He just recently graduated from college and moved out of the family home. He is now trying to start a new life and career all the while finding out what kind of man he is to become.

Others:

Dad: Larry, Christian and Pete's Dad.

Beth Parker: A girl from the brothers' high school

Kelly (Never seen): Larry's wife.

Dana (Never seen): Christian's now ex-wife.

CAPTION READS: 1991

FADE INTO:

INT. HOME – LATE MORNING

DAD (49), LARRY (12), CHRISTIAN (9) and PETE (5) are all thrashing throughout the house roughhousing with one another in their underwear. The three YOUNG BOYS climb on DAD's legs and arms like small Asians trying to take down Godzilla.

DAD

Ahhhh. Nothing can stop the Dadzillaaaa.

THE BOYS run around their DAD, it's a combination of hiding and attacking tactics. This continues for some time.

DAD

Ok, now you guys hurry up and go hide. We can probably get one more round in before Mom gets home.

THE BOYS scatter. DAD begins to count down out loud. LARRY hides in the kitchen closet cracking the door so he can see the entire kitchen while CHRISTIAN finds a spot in the kitchen cabinet. PETE scurries around trying to find his place.

DAD

Ready or not, here I come.

PETE frantically tries to find a place, he quickly opens and chooses the cabinet where CHRISTIAN is, hops in and quickly closes the door. DAD walks into the kitchen; there is an obvious racket coming from the cabinet. He creeps closer and closer to the cabinet. As he reaches down to open the cabinet door LARRY jumps out of the closet and yells, DAD turns and we finally see a frustrated CHRISTIAN shoves PETE out of the cabinet.

DAD

Well you guys sure made that one easy. It's a tie?

CHRISTIAN

Thanks Pete, I could have won.

LARRY playfully attacks DAD, CHRIS and PETE follow, just as they all make their moves there is a noise from the front door. They all freeze, LARRY: hanging from his fathers neck draped over his back like a cape, CHRISTIAN: attempting to hold down his arms and PETE: riding his right leg as if it were a tire swing.

LARRY

It's her.

PETE

Mommy.

CHRISTIAN

Petey still calls her mommy.

LARRY

Of course he does, he's a baby.

PETE

Am not.

LARRY

That's not a bad thing buddy. I was a baby, Christian was a baby, even dad was a baby at one time.

DAD

Yeah kiddo, you're only as big of a baby as I am.

CHRISTIAN

That's a big baby.

PETE sticks his tongue out at CHRISTIAN.

DAD

Ok guys, is everything ready for mom?

We reveal the living room covered with childishly placed Mother's Day signs.

PETE

Yup.

CHRISTIAN

Yea.

LARRY

Yes sir.

We watch the four shirtless boys look upon the door. Slowly we track closer and closer to LARRY's observant face: DAD looking upon the door smiling, CHRISTIAN could kind of care less but is there anyway, PETE staring at the door with his huge boyish eyes. LARRY notices it all, and as he looks upon his DAD and BROTHERS we see that he is just happy to be a part of it all. The door begins to open, we hold on LARRY's smile and –

DISSOLVE TO BLACK:

A series of credits roll until the TITLE: 'LARRY AND HIS BROTHERS' appears.

CAPTION READS: 2011, DISSOLVING INTO: 20 years later

FADE INTO:

EXT. COFFEE SHOP PATIO – LATE AFTERNOON

We are in ELS of a very busy coffee shop on the corner of Culver Blvd. and Lafayette Pl. in Culver City. LARRY (32) and PETE (25) are sitting at a patio table waiting for their brother CHRISTIAN (29).

LARRY

Three thirty! I tell you what; I don't know why we don't just start telling him to meet us an hour earlier than the actual time we plan to meet.

PETE

Nothing is quite as important as Christian's agenda. You know that.

LARRY

Yeah, not even dad.

PETE

Dad? What do you mean?

LARRY

Ah' nothing. I don't really want to talk about it until we're all here.

PETE

Oh... Ok.

LARRY

Sorry, I just think everything should be said at once.

PETE

You're kind of worrying me, what's going on?

LARRY

No, no don't, it's really not a big deal, I promise.

PETE

Ok.

LARRY

Anyway. How are things since you moved out of the house?

PETE lets out a long breath.

PETE

A little slower than what you guys got going on here, that's for sure.

LARRY

Well I'm glad you finally decided to move out here, you needed to get out of Elslee.

PETE

Yeah. But, it's strange though, I feel really guilty sometimes. Leaving him. He hasn't been alone there since mom died.

LARRY

You can't let him hold you back though.

PETE

You're right, I really feel like it was the right thing to do. I... I needed to spread my wings a little, right?

LARRY

Yes, of course you did. I really think this was good move for you. I hope this guilt wasn't brought on because you think he's dying or something.

PETE

No. You just freaked me out. But, I should have known you wouldn't have told me before Chris got here.

LARRY

Why is that?

PETE

You're Larry.

LARRY

I guess I'll take that as a compliment.

They share a smile.

PETE

You're right though; I just really needed to get out of there. He was driving me crazy.

LARRY

I know; it's hard dealing with him sometimes, especially while you're in school. I'm surprised you held out as long as you did, I really don't think I could've done it.

PETE

Yeah, well. You know?

PETE digests LARRY comment.

(cont.)

You're right!

I've done my time!

LARRY

I know you have, but go easy on the guy. He's gettin' older.

PETE

Yeah, but. Larry, I just don't want to ever go back there. I feel guilty, but I just, don't. It's like trying to grow grass on concrete.

A bit of a small silence between the two of them. LARRY seems a little disappointed with his brother's sternness.

PETE

What?

LARRY

Oh, it's nothin'.

LARRY tries to shift the conversation.

(cont.)

We haven't talked in such a long time.

PETE

Well...

LARRY

How can his life be that demanding?

PETE

What?

Oh. What's the big deal, it's Christian. Are you really that surprised? He's a busy guy.

LARRY

No. You're right. It's just normal ole' Chris.

PETE

Why are you getting so worked up about it?

LARRY

He just doesn't get it Pete.

PETE

He's busy.

LARRY

Yeah, but there is a time and place for priorities, and obviously neither we, nor Dad are anywhere near his.

PETE

He's...

LARRY

He's got no loyalty. I tell you what, if we were the Corleone family he'd be swimmin' with the fishes right along with Fredo.

PETE

Fredo?

LARRY

You've never seen The Godfathers?

PETE a little embarrassed.

(cont.)

Fredo is the brother that betrays Mike leading Mike to make a questionable judgment by killing his own brother blurring the line between family and business.

PETE

Not ringing any bells.

LARRY

Oh come on. I don't even like movies, but even I know that one.

PETE

Ok, so you're Mike in this scenario?

LARRY

Yeah.

PETE

So who am I?

LARRY

Well Sonny I guess

PETE

What happens to him?

LARRY doesn't really want to answer.

LARRY

Ah, that's not the point.

PETE

What? What happens to him, does he just get thrown aside?

LARRY

Well... he gets shot, to say the least. It really doesn't matter.

PETE

But, you're the only one that lives?

LARRY

Well, yeah. In the scenario. But, if makes you feel any better, in the end I'm left all alone with nothing but my morals.

PETE looks a little confused and unimpressed.

(cont.)

Chris just doesn't understand family.

PETE

Give him a break, isn't that what 'you' would suggest?

LARRY

Why are you defending him?

PETE

Well, you told me to go easy on Dad, so...

LARRY a little impressed.

LARRY

Pete the mediator.

PETE

Watchin' the best.

LARRY

Yeah, yeah.

PETE

Not be get too off topic, but have you seen Chris's latest girl? Wooh! I didn't even know he and Dana split.

LARRY puzzled.

LARRY

Huh? I. I had no idea. What happened?

PETE

Ah', well, I think he...

LARRY

Not all that surprised. Most people focus their energy on a job or a family.

You know if he put half the energy he puts into woman, into his career, he'd be, Cary Grant by now.

Did you even see that *Gone, Lost Forever*, I think it was called?

PETE

I heard about it, is that the one where he was Frank Sinatra?

LARRY

Dad would be offended hearing Frank's words slurred so badly. Talk about an uneven performance.

CHRISTIAN walks up behind LARRY grabbing his shoulders.

CHRISTIAN

Uneven? What's uneven? Petey's haircut?

CHRISTIAN moves to 'noogie' PETE's head as he goes to take a seat.

(cont.)

How are ya' buddy?

Larry.

Yeah. It did suck, but that was my first film, and Sinatra has some big boots to fill. Plus, had it not been for that film I would have never have met Stacy. And of course never won that Teen's Choice award.

PETE

Stacy! That's her name. That's who he is seeing now, Stacy.

LARRY

It's about time you made it.

CHRISTIAN

Yeah, I would have been early, but I left late.

LARRY

Just waiting on that Oscar huh?

CHRISTIAN

Always so supportive of me aren't ya' Larry?

PETE

Did that guy really have to Knight you at the end?

CHRISTIAN

Yeah, yeah, yeah. That was a little weird. It was good face time though. Plus, there were some bangin' extras.

LARRY

Anyway.

PETE slightly laughing, but shaking his head in disappointment.

CHRISTIAN

Yeah, so what's up with Dad?

PETE

Hey can we hold that thought, I really need to pee; I'll be right back.

CHRISTIAN

Oh come on, I just got here.

PETE

Sorry, I really need to go.

CHRISTIAN

Need me to go with ya' Petey?

PETE

Actually, I could probably use a spotter. The last time I peed in a public bathroom the guy at the next urinal asked me what kind of moisturizer I used.

A weird silence.

(cont.)

Seriously.

LARRY

Go.

PETE walks away.

LARRY

So how you been?

CHRISTIAN

Well you know, same old same old.

CHRISTIAN gets his phone out and starts typing away as he continues the conversation.

LARRY

Well apparently I don't, why didn't you tell me about Dana?

CHRISTIAN

Well, we don't talk that much anymore, and I really didn't think you'd care.

LARRY

What? Why wouldn't I care about my brother getting a divorce?

CHRISTIAN

I don't know. And it's not so much a "divorce" as it is a "I'm tired of sleeping with you." And, I'm sure you're busy with...

Kelly. And I just didn't want to bother.

LARRY

What happened?

CHRISTIAN

She was working all the time.

LARRY

That's what people do Chris.

CHRISTIAN

No. She was always at meetings or traveling, and in that time I must have gone through like a gallon Jergens. A guy has needs.

LARRY

Come on.

CHRISTIAN

Seriously, it was a lot.

LARRY

No, I'm saying you don't just call it quits because you never see your wife.

CHRISTIAN

That wasn't the only reason.

LARRY

What do you mean?

CHRISTIAN

I'm a man of suspense, and when you know the ins and outs of a woman there isn't much, suspense anymore. It's like watching movies on Television.

LARRY with a blank stare.

(cont.)

I want to work for it, you know? It's like... Bergman films; there's a 'forbiddenness' to them.

LARRY

Well if she wasn't around, that's kind of forbidden isn't it?

CHRISTIAN

That's the problem! Ok, bad analogy.

CHRIS tries to muster another analogy.

There was just no suspense left in her vagina.

LARRY

Suspense in her vagina?

CHRISTIAN

Come on, I'm not really the marriage type anyway; you know that, I know that.

LARRY

Vagina suspense?

CHRISTIAN

Can we just not talk about it right now?

LARRY

I just don't...

CHRISTIAN

I messed up! Ok Larry. I messed up. Can we drop it?

There is a thick silence.

(cont.)

You know, it just figures, I finally get a lead in this movie and some direction in my life and some how you need to turn it and mind fuck me into being the bad guy. In case you're keeping score, you're right back on top.

LARRY

Come on. What are you talking about?

CHRISTIAN

What do you mean what am I talking about? You! You always, always have to one up me.

I mean you're like the smartest guy in the world, you go get your PHD in Philosophy at Yale and you work for CAT construction? I mean what is that? Who are you trying to impress? How can you be so self-righteous?

LARRY is at a total lose for words.

LARRY

Ok. Wha, Whe, where is this coming from? What do you...

PETE comes back from the bathroom. CHRISTIAN immediately tries to cover up his anger.

CHRISTIAN

Hey! Hey, it's about time. That was just about one of the longest pisses ever.

PETE

No, I ran into Beth Parker and we were talking a bit.

CHRISTIAN

Ah'. Ooooo, Beth Parker? She still as cute as she was in high school?

PETE

Yeah, well. Yeah, I mean...

CHRISTIAN gets up from his chair immediately, the hunt is on.

(cont.)

Chris... Chris wait... Chris.

Why does he do that? He's always doing stuff like that. There's just no loyal...

LARRY is kind of surprised by PETE's anger. He and PETE watch on as CHRIS swindles BETH.

LARRY

Why are you getting so worked up?

PETE catches himself.

PETE

O', well, how does he know I wasn't going after her?

LARRY

Were you?

PETE

Maybe. Do you think he just assumes? Or just doesn't care?

LARRY

When you work with as many fruits as he does there has to be some kind of compensation for the amount of testosterone thrown his way.

PETE

Fruits?

LARRY

Yeah, homosexuals.

PETE

What do you mean?

LARRY

It's as though he has this uncontrollable need to overly 'heterosexualize' himself.

PETE

Heterosexualize?

LARRY

Yeah, to act overly heterosexual to kill any possibility of his own homosexuality. No matter what may be in his way.

PETE

Wow, never thought of it like that.

LARRY

It's beside the point really. But, did you know he and Dana split?

PETE

Well. Yeah, didn't I say that earlier? He's with someone else.

LARRY

Yeah. And if that's the case why is he talking to Beth Parker right now?

CHRISTIAN catches his eyes.

With his hand on her ass.

PETE

What the hell is that? How does he do it?

LARRY

It's amazing what happens to your social status when you're on TV.

PETE

If you're so against television, then why do you know so much about it?

LARRY

Kelly.

PETE

Ah' right. Little whipped?

LARRY

No. A little married. Ah' well I guess it's the same isn't it.

They share a laugh. PETE's a little awkward.

PETE

Listen. I don't know exactly why you called us here or what's wrong with Dad, but I'm, glad you got us here. I kind of wanted to talk to you about something.

LARRY

Yeah? What's wrong?

CHRISTIAN catches LARRY's attention.

LARRY

I'm really sorry Pete, this is ridiculous, Christian! Come on.

LARRY waves Christian over; he comes back to the table.

CHRISTIAN

Why do you need to do that? I'm not a child.

LARRY

I never said you were. You just act like it.

CHRISTIAN roles his eyes.

LARRY

I'm sorry Pete, and I don't mean to keep coming at you like that Chris. I'm sorry guys. I'm just a little on edge.

PETE

What for?

LARRY

Everything really. My life is all over the place.

Kelly's so distant from me anymore; it's really taking a toll on me, on us. I mean it's been almost six months since...

LARRY catches himself.

(cont.)

Sorry.

This isn't about me. It's about, Dad.

PETE

What about Dad?

LARRY

Do you guys even know what's going on with him?

CHRIS and PETE blankly stare.

(cont.)

Well he isn't going to live forever guys, and I just don't know how much longer he can live in the house by himself.

CHRISTIAN

Well. He's got Rex.

PETE

Come on.

CHRISTIAN

What?

LARRY

We just need to think about what we're going to do as a next step.

CHRISTIAN

With the house?

LARRY

Chris, come on.

CHRISTIAN

Ok. Are you talking about putting him in a home?

LARRY

Yeah... but, do we want to do that?

CHRISTIAN

Those places aren't like the institution in *Cuckoo's Nest* anymore guys. They're nice. They're like little gregarious motels for the elderly.

PETE

Yeah, I've actually heard they are pretty nice nowadays.

LARRY

Guys. He doesn't want to leave. He says he won't go anywhere. You would know this if you saw him every once in a while.

He just wants to feel close to home.

I don't think it's a matter of moving him as it is seeing him more. Would it kill you guys to start visiting him?

CHRISTIAN

Well no. But, you know how busy I am.

PETE

Yeah, and I'm never going to get any writing done unless I spend more time with it.

LARRY

Writing?

PETE

Yeah. What? I write.

LARRY

Since when?

PETE

I started right after I graduated. I needed something to do.

CHRISTIAN

Yeah, he's started this screenplay about...

LARRY is a little confused.

PETE

It's about these three brothers and their dysfunctionality and inability to relate to each other's personalities.

LARRY and CHRISTIAN stare.

(cont.)

What?

What just because it's about three brothers doesn't mean it about you guys. That actually hadn't occurred to me.

CHRISTIAN

So, what did you decide on that teaching job out here?

LARRY

Teaching job?

PETE

Yeah, it's just a TA thing.

LARRY

What? Why didn't you tell me about that? I thought you were coming out here for...

CHRISTIAN

Get off his ass Larry. Sometimes people's ideas of life are a little less conventional. You should know, it's not always as easy as deciding to work for Bedrock...

LARRY

Fine! Forget all this shit about us. Please! Can-we-just-talk-about dad?

There is a long thick silence between them all.

CHRISTIAN

Remember the Christmas after Mom died? Dad was left with getting presents for all of us? Do you remember that Christmas?

PETE

No, but what's your point?

CHRISTIAN

You know why you can't remember, because we got nothing. Not even a Wonka Bar. Even Charlie Bucket got a Wonka Bar.

LARRY utterly disgusted.

LARRY

Mom died.

PETE

Why would you bring this up?

CHRISTIAN

Dad didn't do anything when we needed him the most, he fended for himself, and that's what I'm doing now. He fended for himself then, he can fend for himself now.

LARRY

Christmas one year? That was like 18 years ago.

CHRISTIAN

Exactly, and yet. Here it is! It's the principal. We were children.

That's just how important Christmas is; you know all that talk about the magic of Christmas. Had he done something, we could very well be very different people today. We might even be able to sit down with each other and have a conversation!

CHRISTIAN seems to be unraveling at the seams. The chemistry is becoming very uncomfortable.

(cont.)

I'm sorry! Ok Larry, I really am. I'm sorry I couldn't be someone different, this is just who I am.

LARRY

What is going on? What are you even saying Chris?

LARRY sits waiting for a response. There is a long stretch of silence. CHRIS gets very emotional and can't look at him anymore. PETE tries to break the silence, at this moment he is choosing his side –

PETE

You know Larry; I think he's right.

LARRY glares toward PETE in disbelief of his agreement.

What would have happen to Ralphie had he never gotten that rifle? He could have grown up to be like a sex predator or something. And what would have happened to the Grinch had little Cindy Lou never believed in him? He probably would have killed everyone in Whoville.

LARRY frozen in disbelief. He's speechless.

LARRY

So, you think this is funny? I just. Can't believe what I'm hearing. Are you guys serious?

There isn't a response.

(cont.)

I came here so that we could have a civil discussion about what we should do with our aging father and all you guys can do is talk about yourselves and how he didn't get you presents one Christmas.

Is something else going on here?

Thick silence. CHRISTIAN can't handle it anymore.

(cont.)

Tell me if you need anything for whatever you do with him. I can't do it anymore. I'm sorry Larry.

CHRISTIAN gets up and leaves.

LARRY

Chris, hold on.

LARRY reaches for his arms but misses. CHRISTIAN continues on without looking back.

(cont.)

Chris!

There is no response.

(cont.)

What the hell was that?

PETE

You just couldn't listen to us Larry.

LARRY

What? Me listen? This isn't about us!

PETE

It is about us! We have careers to worry about Larry.

LARRY

Careers?

PETE

Christian is right. You never support us do you? You're always just worried about Larry, and what Larry wants.

LARRY

What are you talking about?

Pause.

PETE

You're Mike.

LARRY is utterly disgusted and disappointed with that comment.

(cont.)

We wanted to tell you, but you wouldn't listen. I wanted to bring it up earlier so that way it would be out in the open and we could talk about it.

LARRY

What are you talking about?

PETE prepares himself for what he is about to tell LARRY.

PETE

Dana divorced Chris because he cheated on her.

LARRY is kind of confused with where he's going with this.

(cont.)

With Kelly...

LARRY's reaction is the culmination of shock, recognition and sadness. He is literally stunned beyond belief. He blinks hard for a few hard moments as though his life or morality had been for nothing. We watch LARRY and slowly track into an ECU of his face.

(cont.)

Listen, I'm sorry Larry. I really don't know what to say. But I think. It'll just take some time.

Pause.

I need to be goin' or I'll be late for my meeting.

PETE gets up and leaves LARRY sitting all by himself.

CUT TO:

ELS of LARRY sitting at the table, the street corner is busy with people walking and cars driving by. His life and his problems are only a tiny spec on the scale of the world surrounding him. We sit with LARRY for a bit longer and then we -

FADE TO BLACK.

CAPTION READS: 2 months later

FADE IN:

EXT. LARRY'S DAD'S HOUSE – DAY

The front door opens and we watch DAD (70, an old 70) standing joyously in the doorway. We watch LARRY make his way up the sidewalk to the front door with his hands filled with suitcases.

DAD

Larry!

LARRY

Hey Dad.

DAD

I'm so glad you're here.

LARRY

Me too Dad.

DAD

Of course I wish it could've been under better circumstances.

LARRY

She's just a woman. Besides being with family is always a good circumstance.

They share a warm loving smile; nothing else needs to be said.

DAD

Here, let me help you with those.

LARRY

No, no. Dad, please I've got it.

We reveal a large moving truck in the driveway. LARRY walks by his father to empty his first load as DAD waits by the door. LARRY returns –

DAD

So how are Pete and Chris, have you talked to them lately?

There is a short pause.

LARRY

Why don't we just go in, I've got some things to tell you.

The two of them walk inside together. We watch the open door for some time as we wonder what is to be-

come of this situation. We hold a little longer on the open door until we slowly –

FADE TO BLACK.