Whispering Circle

A Narrative Film by Jacob Jester

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Project Committee:

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Since I became a College Scholar, the easiest aspect of my curriculum was choosing my style of senior project; it was always going to be a narrative fiction movie. Arranging the particulars of the project, however, proved much more complex.

The original story for the project, and the one I presented in project descriptions for grants and scholarships, was quite different from the tale I presented at my senior defense. The original plot involved a young man nicknamed Fetch, who had fled from Appalachia to university in the icy north, returning to his home, tailed closely by an overzealous P.I. for reasons unknown. However, when I returned from my study abroad (where I wrote the original script) to sit down and talk about the project with my pre-production crew (Jaye Sarah Davidson and Shannon Petrie) in early January, it quickly became apparent that the story was not logistically feasible, and would either have to be cut down or discarded for something more manageable. We tried appending and scaling down the story at first, but I felt that too much was being lost or compromised, so I decided to shelve the project for the time being.

Right before a meeting that would introduce the project to the University of Tennessee's more histrionic-minded students, I pitched Jaye a new story, a scripted-life ghost-yarn that, while certainly more fantastical than the original idea, would be much more manageable to shoot in a single semester: three major locations, six characters, simple, in-camera special effects, and a small crew. We quickly broke the story on the way to the meeting, pitched it to the actors, then committed to developing the project.

Since mid-to-late February was the target date to begin shooting, "Whispering Circle" had to be developed fairly quickly. January and February were writing months, and eventually I came up with an early draft. The work was bulky at some sixty pages, much more complex than I

had originally intended, and anticlimactic; needless to say, it still needed work. While writing the second draft, I was continually auditioning actors, using pages from the first draft for audition scripts. I added a new character (Mike Misener) to the screenplay to add dynamism, humor, and a more satisfying ending, cut some superfluous events and dialogue, and ended up with a new screenplay of fifty-one pages, just in time for the cast reading. After hearing the script read aloud, I was able to cut twenty more pages, and finally ended up with the script closest to what is seen onscreen. The finished story goes something like this:

Franklin O'Taine, while trying to woo a girl, discovers a spirit who helps him plan out his ideal future, scripting his day in screenplay format for almost a decade. However, when the spirit surmises that the quality of Frank's life has peaked, he refuses to give any more advice, instead merely telling Frank he should die. During the course of a single day, the young man must decide whether to heed the spirit's advice or go on living without his help.

Pre-production continued through writing and casting, and involved mostly location scouting and shopping for props/set dressings and camera equipment. The former proved most difficult, and we spent a great deal of time searching for an office and an old, abandoned house. The offices of the Knoxville Sentinel and a run-down house in Seymoure, Tennessee looked promising, but the owners of these properties were taking far too long to get back to us, so we settled on a couple of other locations, each of which turned out to be more than workable; the "haunted house" location even turned out to be my favorite by far of the locations we found. The final step of pre-production involved working out the storyboards, planning all of the shots, and making up a rough shooting schedule.

Production proved to be more difficult than the projected six-to-seven shooting days. While we were originally scheduled to wrap principle shooting by the end of spring break, we lost two actors and had to recast the roles (one role had to be recast twice). Because of this, only about half of the shooting was done by the end of spring break, and the remaining shooting days had to be spread out over the month of April due to the actors' schedules (our lead had been cast in UT's production of Guys and Dolls, which made scheduling most tricky); we also had to renegotiate shooting times with the parties who owned our locations. Also, during test shoots, I often had to take more time than I projected on set because of my unfamiliarity with HD video cameras. However, once the actors and locations were procured, the scripts distributed, the equipment set up, and action was called, the shooting days ended up being the most fun I have ever had on a project. The combination of planned and improvised shooting techniques was satisfying, as was working with the actors. Hunter Roberts, who played the newest character, Mike Misener, was a great pleasure to work with, and I often let him improvise his lines and actions, as he was always very skilled at finding moments that I did not see, even when writing and planning the production.

During April, I was also simultaneously editing and teaching myself Avid Pro Xpress HD. The editing process was perhaps the most challenging aspect of the production, and not only because I had to teach myself the new software. I had originally planned a ten-to-one shooting ratio; in other words, for every one minute of screenplay, I would have ten minutes of footage. Due to actor improvisations, problems on set, and on-set rewrites (often a necessity due to the incompatibility between the locations I *wrote* and the locations we *found*), I ended up with some five and a half to six hours of footage, which I had to whittle down to a scant thirty minutes. The project slowly came together, however, though time because rushed and I was forced to transfer

the footage to Pinnacle Studio, a program with which I was more familiar and thus could work through more quickly.

Finally, I added some pick-up shots during one weekend of shooting (increasing the total number of shooting days to about eight) and quickly edited them into the finished product, a thirty-five minute narrative movie. I experienced some problems exporting the project onto a DVD, but eventually got the movie off of my computer and into the hands of my defense committee.

The defense itself went remarkably well; Chris Holmlund, Baldwin Lee, and Bill Larsen were all impressed by the finished product. Some notable comments: they lauded the editing, saying that it was dynamic and gave the impression of a multiple-camera setup, they thought the shot composition was most inventive, and they all agreed that Mike Misener was the best written and performed character. Some criticisms: they thought the film lost some of its visual dynamism in the final scene, the sound is still problematic in places. Dr. Larsen thought that the plot point about the spirit actually scripting Frank's life was unclear, though Chris and Baldwin thought there was enough exposition to make this point. Finally, to my great surprise and pleasure, Chris propounded that this was among the best student productions to come out of the University of Tennessee. I plan in the coming days to implement changes addressing their criticisms, but overall, I regard this project to be a huge success.

1. INT. THE HOUSE: MORNING 1

An old, rotting living room of a condemned house. Sunlight barely seeps in through from the outside.

WHAM. The door explodes open. A figure, his face in shadow, steps inside, grabs a chair, and drags it to the room's center.

He settles the chair in front of a table containing an old typewriter and a stuffed beaver. Reaching into his messenger bag, he extracts a piece of paper and inserts it into the typewriter's carriage. He sits.

His figure shifts into the light, and we see FRANK O'TAINE, 25, dressed in running gear. He is confident, cocky, smug.

FRANK
So. What do I do today?

The light from outside flickers and fails, and the typewriter TAK-TAKs three letters. Frank rips the paper from the carriage, taking a look.

INSERT: THE PAPER. A single word: "Die."

Frank's smug smirk falters. Some drops of black, viscous fluid fall from the ceiling onto his face.

FRANK (CON'D)
Beg pardon?

2. EXT. THE HOUSE: NIGHT, NINE YEARS AGO 2

Car headlights flood over a fallen street sign reading "Whispering Circle." Further down the street, an ancient Mercedes climbs up a gravel driveway, the headlights revealing the same rotten, abandoned house's exterior.

The driver cuts the car's engine, leaving the headlights on. Two figures step out of the car: Frank, now 16, and BONNIE BARLOWE, also 16, both dressed in late 90's fashion. They approach the house.

3. INT. THE HOUSE: CONTINUOUS 3

The house's interior; it doesn't look any better nine years ago.

The doorknob rattles once, twice, and shoots open. Frank and Bonnie, lips welded together in a fierce kiss, stumble into the living room. Frank shuts the door with his foot.

Upstairs, a dark figure watches the two as they kiss, dripping a black, viscous fluid down the handrail. The figure flickers and vanishes just as the door slams and darkness blankets the stairs.

FRANK
So you scared yet?

BONNIE
Of what, you?

FRANK
You know. The ghosties, the ghoulies.

BONNIE
Don’t get your beams crossed, Egon. I haven’t bought into that spirit world, high-fantasy bullsh since I was, like, six or sev.

FRANK
Really? Not so much as a sprite or forest nymph?

BONNIE
Neg. My parents couldn’t even get me to believe in Santa. My big SIS was still having annual sit-downs in those portly, pervy mallrats’ laps by the time I had THAT sussed. SO awk. Mom says I was, like, totally precoshe.

FRANK
You don’t like syllables, do you?

BONNIE
Obvi.

They lock lips again. Behind them, the dark figure appears, snaking its slimy fingers around the door frame. It flickers and vanishes.

Frank’s hand creeps up the back of Bonnie’s shirt, lifting it to unveil his next obstacle: the clasp. He fiddles with her bra, yanking, prying, attempting a snapping motion with his fingers; all unsuccessful.

He opens one eye and pulls the clasp as far away from her back as possible, trying to place it in his eye line. His fingers slip,

and the clasp rockets back, violently SNAPPING on her upper back. She recoils, pushing him away and grimacing in pain.

BONNIE
Jesus cran-apple Christ!

FRANK
Oh God! I’m- I’m really sorry!

Bonnie paces off the pain, reaching as best as she can to rub the welt on her back. She checks out the injury in a broken mirror hanging on the wall.

BONNIE
It’s a bra, not a sling-shot, you ham-handed twat. Jesus!

FRANK
Look, I’m sorry; it was an accident, just... please; it’s too soon to leave.

BONNIE
You wann talk “too soon,” Chowderpants?

Frank’s face goes beet red; he looks at his crotch.

BONNIE (CON’D)
Yeah. I felt it. Look, here’s the sitch, Frank: you go start up the car while I make sure my spine is still aligned correctly, and MAYBE I won’t tell everyone at school about-

In the mirror, Frank’s eye catches the oozing silhouette behind him. He whirls around, scanning the area where he glimpsed the apparition, but the floor behind him is empty.

FRANK
Did you see that?

BONNIE
Oh, God, this is SO not the time.

FRANK
No, for real... there was something in the mirror.

BONNIE

Just chill out, okay? Go start the car. It’s whatevs.

FRANK
Could you just... NOT with the truncations?

Bonnie stops pacing, looks back to Frank.

BONNIE
What, you don’t like the way I talk?

FRANK
Oh, of course I do. Truly, your command of the English language is such that it borders on linguistic autocracy.

BONNIE
You like syllables, don’t you?

FRANK
Ob. Vi. Ous. Ly. I mean, Jesus. I’ve never met someone so... morbidly obtuse.

BONNIE
Hey. I am NOT fat.

FRANK
No. Obtuse. NOT obe-

HECTOR (O/S)
Yes. Keep it up. Make her mad.

FRANK
What did you say?

BONNIE
I said NOT fat.

FRANK
No, not... I coulda sworn I heard-

BONNIE
Hey! Frank! Front and center.

Frank turns back to see Bonnie has pulled up her shirt, exposing her bra. She points to her ribs.

BONNIE (CON'D)
See? NOT fat. Look at my ribs. Are you looking at my ribs?

He stares blankly at her breasts.

FRANK
I'm not QUITE there, but they're in my periphery, yes.

She pulls her shirt back down.

BONNIE
Good. Funny. You should keep that up. I hear it's a good for coping with virginity.

HECTOR (O/S)
Insult her. You won't regret it.

FRANK
Shut up!

BONNIE
That's it. I'm walking home.

FRANK
You're not going anywhere until I figure this out.

BONNIE
Yeah, like you figured out the clasp? What are you gonna do this time, burn the house down?

FRANK
Least I can finish a whole word, you illiterate moron.

BONNIE
Nerd.

FRANK
Idiot.

BONNIE
Virgin.

FRANK
Slut.

Bonnie slaps Frank in hard in the face. She grabs him where his lapels would be, pulling his body against hers. Frank shuts his eyes and turns his face away, cowering.

BONNIE
You horny?

FRANK
I’m bleeding!

BONNIE
Close enough.

She kisses him hard, usurping his balance and sending him toppling onto the floor. She sheds her shirt and pounces on top of him.

As they kiss, the hand flickers into view over her back. It slowly creeps forward, dripping the black fluid in a line of small dots along her spine. The hand hovers above her neck.

The hand lowers, and unclasp her bra.

CUT TO BLACK.

4. INT. THE HOUSE: AN HOUR AND A HALF LATER 4

Bonnie and Frank, both now fully dressed, walk hand in hand to the old house’s door. They stop at the threshold, facing each other under the door frame like an Edgar Allen Poe prom photo. He grins like an idiot; she’s aloof.

FRANK
So we should do that lotsa times.

BONNIE
Uh, yeah. It was... fun... and all, but if you’re wanting a return visit, I’m gonna require either some serious incentive or some Class A brain failure before-

Frank unsheathes a silver, shiny flask from his jacket, dangling in front of her. Bonnie raises her eyebrows.

BONNIE (CON'D)
Huh. Twofer.

She turns and seizes the flask from Frank, quickly unscrewing it and taking a hefty swig.

BONNIE (CON'D)
So for our next go, I say you just stick to the panties.

FRANK
P-... Panties? Wh- what happens on our next go?

BONNIE
I'll put it this way: next time on "Bonnie's Body," we'll be covering Part III in our ongoing series on Human Anatomy.

FRANK
Meaning...?

BONNIE
Less of a scholar and more of a slugger, huh? Third base it is, then.

Bonnie opens the door, strutting outside. Frank follows for a second, glowing, then stops at the door. He turns back, walking deeper into the house. Over his shoulder:

FRANK
Hang on... I think I forgot a thing.

BONNIE (O/S)
It's whatevs. I'll be in your piece of crap.

He slowly steps into the center of the living room, looking into the mirror. His breathing heavy, Frank closes his eyes, gulps.

FRANK
Where is the clitoris?

CUT TO BLACK.

5. EXT. THE HOUSE: MORNING, THE NEXT DAY **5**

Frank approaches the house carrying a heavy, large bundle covered by a sheet.

6. EXT. THE HOUSE: CONTINUOUS 6

He opens the door and heaves the bundle to a table. He sets the contents down.

HECTOR (O/S)
Did you bring what I asked?

Frank dramatically draws back the sheet, revealing an old typewriter and a stuffed beaver. He speaks to the beaver:

FRANK
Got it.

He sets a piece of paper into the carriage, and the typewriter activates, seemingly of its own free will. It types furiously.

7. INT. MONTAGE OF SCENES 7

Frank RIPS the sheet out of the typewriter, scanning it quickly. He grins.

INSERT: THE PAPER. Frank's entire next day planned out in screenplay format.

He's in a predominantly pink bedroom, queen bed. Giddy and giggling, he and a different girl collapse onto the queen-size, kissing.

TAK-TAK. DING. RIP.

A college dorm now. Different girl, same process, twin bed.

TAK-TAK. DING. RIP.

Different dorm. They've upgraded to a double.

TAK-TAK. DING. RIP.

An office now, taking an interview. Clad in a stylish suit, he stands, shaking his interviewer's hand enthusiastically; this is MAGNUS GREY.

TAK-TAK. DING. RIP.

A nice restaurant, with another pretty girl; this is MYCA MISENER. Frank takes a knee and presents a small velvet box from his jacket. He opens it to reveal the ring; she puts a hand over her mouth, her eyes tearing up.

TAK-TAK. DING. RIP.

He and Myca in a nice, unfurnished apartment, unpacking boxes.

TAK-TAK. DING. RIP.

8. INT. FRANK'S HOUSE: MORNING, THE PRESENT 8

Frank, who now dons running gear, shaves in the mirror and brushes his teeth. He glances at his watch, spits, towels off.

Exiting the bathroom, he collides with Myca in the doorway. He steps aside, chivalrously presenting her the door.

MYCA
That's right, bitch.

She scoots by, kissing him on the way past. At the sink, she washes her face while Frank leans in the door frame.

FRANK
You're up later than usual. Good dream? Bad dream? Wet dream?

MYCA
Dress is tomorrow. Petrie gave the actors the day off to rest up.

FRANK
Ah. Shame you won't have any time for that. I mean, really, you're gonna be just haggard for the show.

MYCA
And why's that?

Frank moves behind her, placing his hands on her waist. He makes like Barry White in a deep, sing-song timbre.

FRANK
'Cause baby... You and me, we got this, uhngh, carnal connection!

MYCA
What are you doing?

FRANK
Just havin' a go at some Barry White.

MYCA
Be much obliged if you had a stop at it.

FRANK
Fair enough.

MYCA
Besides, I don’t really think you’re gonna want to “connect” me this week anyway.

FRANK
Oh? Oh. Ugh. Well, least you’re not pregnant.

MYCA
No, no. Mike gets in today.

Frank removes his hands, throws Myca an annoyed, meaningful look. He exits the bathroom, moving through the house. Myca follows.

MYCA (CON’D)
Frank, you promised. No fighting.

FRANK
Yeah, promised for you. Not for him.

MYCA
He’s family.

FRANK
He’s a skinhead.

MYCA
Frank, he was just having a laugh. He’s a bit crass, but, I mean... you ARE an Irish Jew. It’s a little uncommon.

They reach the kitchen. On the counter, a briefcase. Frank throws open the hinges, then opens the refrigerator. He grabs a sandwich and places it in the briefcase, closing it and snapping it shut.

FRANK
I would happily make love to a cabbage patch of grody menstrual vag before I believed he was “just having a laugh.”

She gives him an annoyed look.

FRANK (CON'D)
What? They're all yours.

Carrying the briefcase, he moves to the living room; Myca follows.

MYCA
He's not as bad as you think; you guys just don't have a good repoire.

She stops him just before the door, turning him by the shoulders to face her. The front door rattles, and the handle jiggles. Frank rubs his temples, squeezing his eyes shut.

MIKE (O/S)
I'm here!

MYCA
Come on. He makes cartoons. You know, for kids. He's like Disney without the anti-Semitism.

The door bursts open, and MIKE, his back to Myca and Frank, drags two hefty suitcases through the threshold.

MIKE
Is the kike gone yet?

MYCA
...He's like Disney.

Myca gives a wide smile, selling it. Frank's dour expression breaks, and he matches her grin. He kisses her.

FRANK
For you.

MYCA
Go. Bring bacon.

Frank pushes past Mike and out the door. He takes a pedometer out of his pocket, setting it to zero. Myca storms up to Mike.

MIKE

Ah. Myca. Hey. Sorry about the kike thing.

MYCA
Michael, what did we agree on about your language around Frank?

MIKE
No ethnic slurs.

MYCA
AND no taking the Jewish Lord’s name in vain.

MIKE
God damn it.

MYCA
Michael!

MIKE
Oh, Jesus Christ!

MYCA
That’s much better.

Frank shuts the door and takes off, jogging at a healthy pace.

9. INT. HECTOR’S HOUSE: MORNING, THE PRESENT **9**

We see a brief flash forward of the events from the film’s beginning, then:

FRANK
Beg pardon?

HECTOR
Today you must die.

FRANK
Uh-huh. And how does that come about?

HECTOR
Anyway you please.

FRANK

Ah. Well, I DON’T please. So, there. Crisis averted. Now, get typin’ there, Patrick Swayze.

HECTOR
Frank, please listen.

FRANK
Yeah, fine, just make it quick, okay? I’ve got a report due on my boss’s desk within the hour. And could you please watch it with the ghost pus? I feel like Jacob Marley’s girlfriend.

HECTOR
When you come here, I see you mostly as you see me. I sense a presence, but only glimpse you in flashes. Most of the time, I can’t see you at all.

FRANK
And it’s a true shame, because honestly, you’re really missing out.

HECTOR
Instead, I see you as you wish to be. I see you at your happiest, and I see all possible ideal paths that lead you to that state.

FRANK
And... today is different how?

HECTOR
Today, when you crossed my threshold, I could see you.

FRANK
Uh-huh. And let me ask you something, Casper. Can you see me now?

HECTOR
No.

FRANK

And what does that tell you about my general mood at the moment?

HECTOR
Your happiness has peaked. I can do nothing more to help you. Do you know what happened to me when I died, Frank?

FRANK
You became more powerful than I could possibly imagine.

HECTOR
I became trapped. Entrenched between the state of my demise and the state I wished to achieve. It’s a position I would never wish for you.

FRANK
Okay, look, I really appreciate your attempts at practical jokery, and I encourage you to continue developing your routine, because really, what oracular spirit today is known for his sense of humor? But A: if this takes much longer I’m going to be seriously late for work, and B: I’m running out of pop culture references. So can we speed this up?

HECTOR
Very well.

FRANK
Thank you. Don’t know what I’d do without you, buddy.

A small drop of black liquid falls onto Frank’s sandwich.

10. INT. GREY’S OFFICE: LATER **10**

Frank, now in business clothes, opens the door to Grey’s office. Grey, his back to the door, snaps his fingers and puts out his

hand. Frank slaps a document into Grey's hand, who reads it and snaps him a thumbs up. Frank exits.

11. INT. AN OFFICE: A FEW MOMENTS LATER 11

Frank falls into his office chair. He unhinges his briefcase, opens it, and takes out another set of papers, shuffling through them. He stops, tracing his finger down the page.

INSERT: FRANK'S "DAY PLAN": A document in screenplay format. Part of the description reads, "Frank falls into his office chair. He unhinges his briefcase..." etc.

Frank regards his current position, nods.

FRANK
Done.

He skims a few seconds longer until a freakishly tall, lanky, tousle-haired idiot in a wrinkled button-up and high-water jeans steps up to his desk. This is DAVIDSON.

DAVIDSON
Hey, O'Taine. Grey wants you. Sounds pissed.

FRANK
Uh, okay. Sure.

Confused, Frank rises from his desk, flipping to the next page of the "script" and reading as he walks. He stops dead.

INSERT: FRANK'S "DAY PLAN": "Frank seizes his sandwich from his briefcase, then proceeds to Grey's office."

Frank arches an eyebrow.

FRANK (CON'D)
Why the hell would I take the sandwich?

He shrugs, and turns back to his desk. Frank seizes his sandwich from his briefcase, then proceeds to Grey's office.

12. INT. GREY'S OFFICE: CONTINUOUS 12

As Frank walks in, Grey is furiously pumping a blood pressure checking device. He spins around to face Frank, scowling.

FRANK (CON'D)

Oh, that can’t be good.

Grey checks the numbers on a pad of paper in front of him.

FRANK (CON’D)
How is it? High?

GREY
You tell me. What’s... 232 divided by 130?

FRANK
Hmm. Yeah, I really don’t think that’s how it works.

GREY
Yeah. Let’s talk about that. Let’s talk about stuff that doesn’t work.

FRANK
Uh, okay. Diet pills, pick up lines, heiresses, hoboes-

GREY
I was supposed to have sex today.

FRANK
Oh, God.

GREY
But thanks to circumstances beyond my control, that’s just not gonna happen today. Now, I’m not saying I can’t get it going. It gets up there. WAY up there. But then it’s down like a kiddie Moonbounce after some idiot powers off the pump: slow, but inevitable.

FRANK
Those poor children...

GREY
So tell me, Frank. If all of my blood is rushing to this big vein here...
(points to vein on forehead)

What the hell do I have left to engorge myself with? I mean, if all the helium’s in the attic, how am I supposed to make balloon animals for the kids in the yard?

FRANK
Why is your crotch a children’s birthday party?

GREY
Why the hell not?

FRANK
I’m very uncomfortable, sir.

GREY
Good.

He throws Frank’s report on the table.

GREY (CON’D)
So am I.

FRANK
I... I don’t understand-

GREY
Obviously not. Now in the past, I’ve been able to hire complete idiots for cheap because I had you to balance it out. Like Davidson out there.

Grey points to Davidson, who is doubled over the copier trying to fish something out from behind it, through the office window.

GREY (CON’D)
Last time I asked him to let me see some gross projections, he showed me a bunch of transparencies of a phalloplasty. But you... you made it all okay. Now tell, me Frank...

He stands, towering over Frank; Frank shrinks in his chair.

GREY (CON’D)

Am I going to have to rethink my little business model because of this?

FRANK
No, sir.

Grey's eye catches the sandwich. He takes a deep, calming breath, and licks his lips.

GREY (CON'D)
Tell you what. First, this is your only major screw-up working for me. Second, I'm starving.

He points at the sandwich.

GREY (CON'D)
So you give me that, AND go back to your old ways, AND get this mess fixed by the end of the day... I'll let it slide.

Frank looks to the device still strapped around Grey's arm.

FRANK
Should you really be eating-

Grey puts out his hand, making an impatient "gimme" gesture. Frank rises from him chair, holds up the sandwich, hesitating a second before surrendering it.

FRANK (CON'D)
Thanks again, Ghostface.

GREY
What?

FRANK
I said, "Enjoy the sandwich."
(to himself)
Why would he screw me on the paperwork and save me later?

Grey takes a bite of the tainted, poisoned sandwich. Frank stands, stepping to the door and out of the room. Before he can close it, Grey coughs, grabbing his chest a bit again. Frank turns, and Grey points to him with his other hand.

GREY
Frank.

FRANK
Yes, sir?

GREY
Your wife’s calling.

Confused, Frank opens his mouth to respond. Behind him, the phone on his desk rings. Frank pivots to the sound, then does a double take back to Grey. The older man makes a “shooing” motion. Frank shuts the door.

13. INT./EXT. AN OFFICE/MYCA’S CAR: CONTINUOUS 13

Frank steps up to the ringing phone, picks up the receiver. He drags the phone up to his ear, hesitant.

FRANK
Hello?

MYCA
Hello, sir. Just thought I’d call you on your lunch break. Pleasant day?

He sits in his office chair, looking back to Grey through the window, amazed.

FRANK
Uh. Not so much. Unpleasant and... weird.

Frank picks Hector’s pages back up, flipping through them, scanning them as fast as he can.

MYCA
Wow! A bad day at work. That’s a first. We should celebrate.

FRANK
Uh, yeah, no, I don’t think I’m gonna feel up to that.

MYCA
Oh, come on. It’ll make you feel better. I’ll even make Mike leave the house.

FRANK
Yeah, okay... maybe.

He traces a finger down the page again, stops in the middle.

INSERT: FRANK'S "DAY PLANNER": "Grey takes a bite of the tainted, poisoned sandwich."

Frank mouths the word "poisoned?" He whips his head back to Grey, who takes another massive bite.

MYCA
Anyway, listen, I should go for now; heavy lunch hour traffic. I'll see you at home, okay?

FRANK
Yeah.

MYCA
Love you!

FRANK
Yeah.

A CLICK at the other end of the line. Frank remains rooted to the spot, phone still to his ear, and watches Grey drop the sandwich. Grey lurches forward, collapsing on his desk.

Frank approaches cautiously, prodding Grey's body. He picks up the sandwich, inspecting the bread, and finds "ghost pus" mingling with the meat. He spins around to flee, but runs into Davidson on the way out.

Frank shoves Davidson out of the way, booking it for the exit.

14. INT. FRANK'S HOUSE: AFTERNOON **14**

Mike is sitting at a table, drawing one of his cartoons. Frank bursts in the front door, still in his business attire, panting, drenched in a new coat of nervous sweat.

MIKE
You're here early. That's weird.

FRANK
You're here period. That's annoying.

MIKE
You know, we'd have quite the lengthy fortune cookie if we took all your witticisms and laid them end to end.

Frank rushes towards the bedroom, opening his briefcase and shuffling through some of Hector's papers. He collides with Myca, sending the papers flying giving her a bitter look, he falls to the floor, clawing through the papers.

MYCA
Frank, what's going on? Your office called. They're saying Mr. Grey's dead and you went missing-

FRANK
Will you just give me a second? I have to find the last page.

MYCA
Frank, listen. You're wanted for questioning. By the police.

He snaps his head upwards, his eyes glazed as if he's just suffered a concussion.

FRANK
Just wait a minute. I HAVE to find-
... since when are you taller than me?

MYCA
...Since you sat down, dear.

FRANK
Oh... Stop it.

Myca kneels, meeting his eye level, and cradles his face in her hands.

MYCA
Frank, it's okay you're upset. Really. Nobody deals well with death. But-

FRANK

I deal with a dead guy every day.
You'd think by now I'd be used to it.

MYCA
But you have to call and fix this.

She hands him the phone.

FRANK
Can't.

MYCA
Why not?

He hurls it into the kitchen, forcing a page into her hands.

FRANK
It's not in the script.

MIKE
(chortling)
I knew it. I knew there was something with that guy.

MYCA
Mike, zip.

MIKE
What? Look at him. He's broken down, probably high as a eunuch's head voice on weed, freaking out 'cause he killed a guy. I mean, why else would he run?

MYCA
Michael. Nobody's killed anybody.

FRANK
No. Hector. Hector did.

MYCA
Who's Hector?

FRANK
He tells me what to do. Plans out my day. My whole future.

MIKE
Oh, here it goes.

FRANK
I mean, I can’t see him most of the time, so I talk to the scarecrow, but his voice is... everywhere.

MYCA
Frank, I’m sorry, but this... this sounds a little crazy.

FRANK
No, no, I talk to the scarecrow so I DON’T look crazy.

MIKE
Good effort.

FRANK
Hey! Mr. Clean! Would you go molest the Scrubbing Bubbles or something? We’re trying to have a conversation.

MYCA
Frank, just-

FRANK
Don’t Just... if you don’t want to help me, I’ll fix this on my own.

MYCA
But I WANT to help. You’re just not making any sense.

FRANK
Well, neither are you. How can you help if you think I’m crazy? You talk to me in this sweet, consoling, condescending tone, but you obviously don’t trust me. You’re being flighty and inconsistent. Just like a woman.

Myca stands.

MYCA
Excuse me?

MIKE
Wow. I MIGHT be racist, but that was DEFINITELY sexist.

FRANK
Yes, a woman. I mean, I throw the lever, and I never know if I'm coming up all sevens or getting two cherries and an angry jester!

MYCA
(deathly calm)
I'm sorry... did you just compare me, and indeed my entire collective sex, to a slot machine?

Frank's eyes go wide, and he stands, taking her hand and cradling it between his.

FRANK
Okay, that was bad, I admit. I'm upset. Just... just come with me. It's the old house on Whispering Circle, I can prove it. It was Hector. Please, I need you. I'm kinda off-book at the moment, and I can't do this without you. Come on. Just... tell me what do I have to do to make you trust me.

MYCA
I don't know, Frank. Why don't you try feeding me a QUARTER?

She rips her hand from his, storming past Mike and out the door. Frank chases after her. Mike holds up his sketch pad. It's a frowny face. Frank looks down at the page in his hand.

FRANK
Oh... oh! Fade Out! It's the last page!

INSERT: THE LAST PAGE. Above "FADE OUT," a single word: "DING."

FRANK (CON'D)
"Ding"? Goddamn it, Hector, what the hell is "Ding"?

Frank storms out the door. Mike shrugs, resumes sketching.

15. INT. HECTOR’S HOUSE: LATER **15**

Frank bursts through the door of the ruined house, clutching the last piece of paper.

FRANK
Ding? DING? What the hell is ding?

HECTOR
It’s the en-DING.

FRANK
Really not the time.

HECTOR
You told me I should work on my sense of humor.

FRANK
You think this is funny? I don’t know what you think you’re doing, but I want you to fix it. Now.

HECTOR
I’m working towards your best interests.

FRANK
Well, undo it! If you haven’t noticed, people generally don’t like stuff that’s good for them.

HECTOR
Which is why I had to step in.

FRANK
Okay, listen. I’m perfectly okay never being as happy as I was when I walked in this morning, just... if you can keep me above some preset minimum of misery, and I’ll be fine.

HECTOR

I’m only trying to help.

FRANK
By ruining my life?

HECTOR
I was merely accelerating the inevitable to prove my point. And to give you both aspects of what you wished of me.

FRANK
By ruining my life? See what I did there? I repeated myself for emphasis. It’s this rhetorical trick that I’ll teach you tomorrow. When I’m still alive.

HECTOR
You had two ambitions that you wished to come of our partnership: to die on your happiest day and to live a full life. Today, I have provided you with enough pain, confusion, and loss to encompass a lifetime. It was something I had deprived of you before, and I apologize.

FRANK
You’re enjoying this, aren’t you?

HECTOR
I get no pleasure from causing you misery.

FRANK
No, you are. It makes you happy. You know how I know that? I can see you.

The figure steps into the door, punching Frank hard in the gut. Frank crumples into the fetal position, struggling for air. The figure steps into the light.

It’s Mike.

MIKE
Wasn’t hidin’.

FRANK
Mike?

Mike circles Frank as he talks, KICKING him in between thoughts.

MIKE
Followed you from your apartment. Wasn’t hard. You weren’t looking back.

MIKE (CON’D)
(KICK)
I thought you were making it all up to cover some scheme, gain my sister’s sympathy.
(KICK)
Didn’t know you were just crazy.
(KICK)
It’s all the same, though. I was kinda looking for an excuse. Besides, you know...

He rubs his shaved head. Behind him, the silhouette flickers into view.

MIKE (CON’D)
The obvious.
(KICK)
So I think it goes without saying you can crawl your broken ass to a loony bin, but if you go near my sister again...
(KICK)
Well, you know.

Mike backs up, shakes himself off, setting up a football player attempting a field goal.

MIKE (CON’D)
Now, Lucy, you gotta promise not to pull back the ball this time. Good grief.

He smirks, takes off. As his left foot falls near Frank’s body, the black liquid drips beneath his sole, thwarting his balance. Mike slides past Frank, falls backwards.

His back hits the table with the typewriter hard, breaking the leg. The table teeters, slips, and the typewriter tumbles down onto his head. CRACK.

Frank cowers, his arms over his head. He stays still a moment, then timidly peaks out. Hauling himself to his feet, he limps over to Mike. Blood spreads on the floor next to his head, mixing with Hector's "ghost pus."

Frank backs away, retching as if he might vomit. He doesn't.

FRANK
Why?

HECTOR (O/S)
You wished him death. Both of them... Grey and Michael. In your mind, you thought it just.

FRANK
In my mind, not... not in general.

He backs against the slime-covered wall, sliding down to sit in the puddle. The fluid drips over his shoulders, into his hair.

FRANK (CON'D)
My life is going to suck now, isn't it?

HECTOR (O/S)
It would have worsened had I intervened or not. I know. Believe me.

FRANK
How do you know? You only lived one life. And you can only see one day in the future. How come I never thought of that? You can only see one... day.

Frank looks over at the battered, beaten scarecrow.

FRANK (CON'D)
They're gonna think this is my fault, aren't they? Myca's gonna... I mean, it IS my fault, but... it wasn't my hand...

HECTOR (O/S)

Yes. They will think that.

FRANK
(feeble, weak)
Please, just... do what you do. Make it better.

HECTOR (O/S)
I cannot make it better, not now. I can only make it... painless.

The “pus” flows thicker, faster now.

Frank scoops some of the fluid in his hand, watches how the light plays off of it, lets it run down his arm.

FRANK
Does it... does it feel different... leaving? Better, worse? Is there a different look, or feel... Is there like a... Doppler effect; does it sound different moving away than it does coming in?

HECTOR (O/S)
I wouldn’t know. I never left.

Frank looks at the slime a second more. He brings it towards his mouth, retracts it. Again, and finally he forces it into his mouth, swallows. He waits a moment.

A FLASH. We see Frank’s flashes of foresight for a moment:

Myca pulls up the driveway of the house on Whispering Circle in her car.

She exits the car door. Mike, bleeding and stumbling, spills out of the front door of the house, collapsing. She rushes to him, revives him, hugs him.

FLASH. Frank, trembling, slides to the floor.

FRANK’S POV: Mike’s chest barely perceptibly moves up and down with the steady, deep rhythm of unconscious breathing.

FRANK
Oh, balls.

Frank’s trembling ceases, his eyes go blank.

The typewriter TAK-TAKs a few final letters.

DING.

FADE TO BLACK.