

Death's Piper

By

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Base on 'Plague Parade'

By

A Fellow Student

INT. ORPHANAGE DOORSTEP - NIGHT

PAST: 17 years ago

It is raining, the lamps doing little to illuminate the dark street. A black car SPLASHES to a stop in front of an imposing brick building, and two small figures clamber out and up the steps.

OLIVER and PERCIVAL MCKAY (age 7), stand shivering on the steps of The Blessed Poor's Orphanage. The boys are identical but for a small scar above Oliver's left eyebrow. Their dark curls are plastered to their foreheads, identical hazel eyes wide.

Percival clutches a stack of BOOKS to his chest, failing to keep them dry. The door opens, and HEADMASTER BARROW, a man in his early 50's with leonine grey hair, smiles kindly down at them.

HEADMASTER BARROW
You must be the McKay twins. Well,
come in, come in out of the rain. God
above, you're soaked through.

Barrow stands aside, opening the door wide, and sweeps his arm back, inviting the boys in.

The twins glance at each other before stepping over the threshold.

INT. INTERNATIONAL ARRIVALS, PHOENIX AIRPORT - DAY

PRESENT: 930 AM

The constant din of airport ANNOUNCEMENTS, muddled CONVERSATIONS, and milk steamers HISSING at a nearby Starbucks is deafening.

Oliver (24), shoulder length hair in a half ponytail, exits the terminal, squinting in the bright Arizona sun. He carries only one small bag with him; a little black leather book sticks out of his duster pocket.

His shoulders droop, his expression is weary, though excitement sparks in his eyes. He watches indifferently as a pair of brothers embrace each other before he heads to a rental car booth.

INT ORPHANAGE BEDROOM - DAY

PAST: 11 years ago

The twins (13), lay on the floor of their shared bedroom, books covering the space around them. One book is open to a page with an ILLUSTRATION of the MOTHMAN. Others open to ILLUSTRATIONS of BIGFOOT, a WENDIGO, and other CRYPTIDS.

The bedroom sleeps 8, the beds in various stages of disarray or tidiness. Oliver's is half made the sheet dragging on the wood floor. Percival's is made to perfection, his pillow fluffed and placed at the exact middle of the headboard.

Though he is skinny, Oliver is tall for his age and glows with health. Percival is small and sickly, his skin ashen, dark circles surrounding both eyes. His hair is lank and dull.

They are busy pouring over H.P. Lovecraft's NECRONOMICON when six BOYS burst LAUGHING through the door. The leader, REGGY HARRIS, stands arms akimbo as he looks over the scene.

REGGY

Oye! Looks like the geeks are back at their studies!

The other boys CACKLE, elbowing each other and pointing at the old books with disgust.

Oliver surges to his feet, eyes blazing, while Percival continues reading, ignoring the bullies. One of the boys, AVERY JAMES, swipes the Lovecraft book from under Percival's hands and begins leafing through it.

PERCIVAL

Hey! Give it back!

AVERY

And what are you going to do about it?
Put a hex on me? What is this rot
you're reading, anyways?

As one the other boys start rummaging through the other books, LAUGHING at the illustrations of cryptids, monsters, and codes found on the pages.

Seeing the tears in his brother's eyes, Oliver steps up to Reggy, their noses inches apart. Oliver is skinny, but he's half a head taller than Reggy.

OLIVER
Put the books back.

REGGY
Or what? You'll go snitch to
Headmaster B--

Oliver slaps Reggy. Avery and the other boys gasp. Percival smothers a grin.

OLIVER
I said, put the books back.

Reggy looks ready to protest, but seeing Oliver's clenched fist, he relinquishes the Lovecraft, dropping it next to Percival. The other boys follow suit.

REGGY
(mumbling)
We was only funning, is all. No need
to get your shirt in a knot...

When neither twin says anything, Avery taps Reggy on the shoulder.

AVERY
Come on, Reg. Let's go somewhere else
so we don't have to breathe the same
air as these... things...

Reggy spits, the gob landing at Oliver's feet and leaves, glaring back at the twins as his gang follows him. Avery, who is the last to leave, kicks a book as he passes, bending the cover and a number of pages.

When the bullies have left, Oliver kneels next to his brother and helps him straighten the books. Percival sniffs and wipes his nose.

PERCIVAL
You didn't have to do that, Ollie.

OLIVER
Yes, I did, Perce. Otherwise, who
will?

Percival smiles gratefully, then chokes. Oliver wraps an arm around Percival's shoulders, holding his brother as he is wracked by violent coughs.

INT. TOYOTA YARIS - DAY

PRESENT: 10 AM

Oliver waits at a traffic light on his way south out of Phoenix. He fiddles with the radio controls until he finds the local rock station, leaning his head back as ALL OUT OF LOVE starts playing.

Taking an exit, he accelerates onto the freeway. He glances at his bag in the passenger seat: the little black book sits on top of it. Oliver looks ahead again, and drives. ACDC's HIGHWAY TO HELL blasts from the speakers.

INT. ORPHANAGE BEDROOM - NIGHT

PAST: 11 years ago

Oliver stares blankly at two beds: one messily made, the sheet dragging on the floor; the other stripped of bedding, bare but for a few stains on the mattress.

Headmaster Barrow rests a liver-spotted, broad hand on Oliver's shoulder. He stares at the two beds as well. His eyes are sad.

Tears slide down Oliver's cheeks.

INT. ORPHANAGE DOORSTEP - DAY

PAST: 6 years ago

The sun is shining, birds CHIRPING in the budding cherry trees on either side of the street.

Oliver (18), and clad in a leather duster - a gift from Headmaster Barrow - stands on the front stairs, looking up and down the street for the cab that will take him away. HEADMASTER STEVENSON, a man in his late 30's and wearing owlsh glasses, waits with him.

Neither speaks. The cab arrives, and Oliver bounds down the steps, balancing three boxes of books in his arms, his clothes in a bag over his shoulder. He puts the boxes and bag gently in the back seat.

As he gets into the cab, Oliver turns to wave goodbye to Stevenson. No one is there. Oliver shuts the door, and the cab drives away.

INT. APARTMENT LIVING ROOM - EVENING

PAST: 1 year ago

A KNOCK comes from the front door. Rousing himself from his fourth compilation of stories of the arcane, mysterious, and cryptic nature, the 23 year old Oliver goes to answer.

The hallway is empty but for a MEDIUM CARDBOARD BOX. Blowing hair from his eyes, Oliver picks it up with a GRUNT and brings it in to his table.

Upon opening it he discovers a handwritten NOTE, along with a number of old, leather bound BOOKS, a CHILD'S SHIRT, and the ragged remains of a KNIT HAT. He blinks back sudden tears as he looks at a last remnant of his brother's belongings.

Shaking his head, he unfolds the note.

HEADMASTER STEVENSON (V.O.)
Oliver. I hope this note finds you well. Here are some things the boys and I discovered upon renovating the old bedroom, under the floorboards. Avery James said they belonged to your brother, Percival. He thought you might want them. Best, Philip Stevenson, Headmaster at The Blessed Poor's Orphanage.

With a guilty look at the stack of revisions on the other side of the table, Oliver rummages through the box.

Setting the hat and shirt aside, he leafs through each book individually. Some he stacks next to his revisions, the rest he sets on the floor.

There are three books left when his hand brushes the cover of the smallest one, made of black leather. He shudders.

Oliver pulls it out, lip curling involuntarily as he thumbs through the thick pages, each filled with strange, illegible RUNES, SYMBOLS, and ILLUSTRATIONS.

On the front page he discovers a POEM, written in English. He reads it, but can make no sense of the words. Going to his computer, he begins researching, revisions forgotten.

EXT. YEWROCK ARIZONA - DAY

PRESENT: 2 PM

Upon arriving at the outskirts of Yewrock, Oliver hesitates. There are no more than twenty buildings in the town, most of them dark and shuttered, paint peeling, roofs patched with rusting sheet metal.

Pulling over, he looks down the empty main street. A tumbleweed bounces across the road before bumping against the wall of the general store. Oliver picks up the book, studies the cover for a moment, then puts it in his pocket.

He gets out of the car, closing the door quietly so as not to disturb the eerie quiet. He pulls his duster tight against the wind that WHISTLES through a broken windows, his hair whipping around his face. Oliver jumps as a shutter CLACKS.

After a moment of indecision, he heads to the general store.

INT. GENERAL STORE - DAY

As he enters, the door CREAKING on its hinges, a bell DINGS somewhere in the back of the store.

OLIVER

Hello?

A few minutes later, OLD MAN SHEPPARD - 78 and hale - shuffles out from behind a set of traditional saloon doors. He glowers at Oliver, his jowls and bald head giving him the appearance of a bulldog.

SHEPPARD

What d'ya want, boy?

Oliver gulps and takes a step back from the open hostility in the old man's face.

OLIVER

I'm... My name is Oliver McKay. I'm here to...

SHEPPARD

I don' care who ya are. Ya better git outta here, boy. Y'aint welcome here.

OLIVER

I'm not... I... No! I just want to know about this.

Oliver holds up the little book. In an instant Sheppard is at his side, the book clutched in his gnarled hands. The old man

stares at it, rheumy eyes glazing as he looks over the pages. With a sigh he hands it back to Oliver.

SHEPPARD
Well, ya already know of its
existence. Can nary stop ya knowin'
'bout it now.

OLIVER
Know what?

Sheppard looks at Oliver with an expression between pity and incredulity.

SHEPPARD
Come t'night, I'll tell -- show -- ya
all.

Glancing out the window, Oliver shrugs.

OLIVER
Alright. I'll get my bag.

SHEPPARD
I'll show ya t'ya room first.

INT. GENERAL STORE BEDROOM - DUSK

PRESENT: 730 PM

Oliver paces from one end of the small, simply furnished room. He rubs a hand over his face, then through his unbound hair.

The bed catches his eye. After considering for a moment he resumes pacing, the book bumping against his thigh. With a huff he flops into the wooden chair by the window; the sky above the buildings on the other side of the street is purple and orange.

Biting his lower lip, Oliver takes the book out, and opens to the page with the poem; the corner is dogeared, and a COFFEE RING stains the bottom right corner.

INT. APARTMENT LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

PAST: 1 month ago

Stifling a yawn, Oliver rubs a hand over his face, smearing pen across his left cheek, and sits back in his chair. His hair has grown out, the ends curling over his shoulders.

The table is covered with used COFFEE CUPS, take-out boxes, and piles of PAPERS, BOOKS, NEWS CLIPPINGS, and ARTICLES about mythic and ancient languages and codes.

Percival's books and countless others are stacked around his chair. The little black book is open to a a page filled with runes resembling PHOENICIAN letters.

Glancing at the clock, Oliver notes it's well past five in the morning. He closes the little book with a resigned sigh. Before he can stand, his eyes drift shut, the etching on the book's cover blurring.

His eyes snap open and Oliver's mouth falls open. The intricate vine pattern is actually a sort of code. Excitement shines in his bloodshot eyes.

Flipping to the back of the book, he transcribes one of the runic alphabets onto a spare sheet of paper, then begins translating the runes on the cover of the book.

With a cry of triumph, Oliver sits back in his chair again, gazing with feverish intensity at the page before him.

A single word has revealed itself to Oliver: YEWROCK.

INT. GENERAL STORE BEDROOM - DUSK

PRESENT: 1048 PM

A knock sounds on the door, startling Oliver awake. The book slides from his lap to the floor with a THUMP.

As he unfolds himself with a groan from the chair, Sheppard peeks his head around the door, his face lit from below by an oil lamp, giving it the appearance of a skull.

He nods at the book, then Oliver

SHEPPARD

Come 'long then. No time to waste.

Rubbing his sore back, Oliver stoops and retrieves the book, returning it to its pocket. With a deft twist of his wrists, he ties his hair into a bun as he strides across the room.

OLIVER

(muttering)

Could have fooled me...

SHEPPARD
Eh? Wha' was that?

OLIVER
Nothing. Let's go.

With a mysterious glance at Oliver, Sheppard leaves, Oliver at his heels.

EXT. ARIZONA DESERT - NIGHT

PRESENT: 1153 PM

A RATTLING Ford F250 rolls to a stop, tires CRUNCHING on the sandy ground as the headlights turn off. The engine SHUDDERS to a stop.

Stepping out of Sheppard's truck, Oliver stretches, taking in the moon-bathed desert. There is nothing for miles around but scrub brush, red rock, and...

OLIVER
What are those?

He indicates a pile of rusty mine carts just ahead of the truck, the remains of a railroad track glinting beneath the sand.

Sheppard shrugs and grunts before shuffling towards the metal hulk.

Scowling, Oliver follows him, his hand edging towards the book in his pocket. As he nears the pile he shudders.

Two more steps forwards reveals why: the carts are full of dead bodies. Some are relatively fresh, others vague, black piles of putrefying flesh, and still others nothing but bones.

Oliver claps a hand to his mouth, sweat beading on his forehead.

SHEPPARD
Here it is, boy. This's whatcha been
lookin' fer.

OLIVER
I don't...

He swallows audibly but stands his ground, knees locked.

A bell TOLLS, the sound low, long, and hollow. As the twelfth bell chimes, Oliver starts, realizing that there is no bell.

Then he notices the figure standing by the carts. Raven-black hair and a cloak shroud it in darkness, its face the only visible thing; the skin is whiter than snow. The eyes catch Oliver's attention.

The irises are rings of silver on black sclerae. They're beautiful, but utterly void of expression.

Without a sound the figure raises ghostly white hands and brings a silver flute to its lips, and begins to play.

As Oliver watches, each cart begins floating; the bodies piled in and around raise themselves up and begin talking amongst themselves in a CHATTERING chorus of bones and teeth.

One by one the carts and their passengers glide around the night sky to the rhythm of the piper's song. The dead dance, sing, and cheer in jubilation.

OLIVER

(quietly)

It's like a parade. They don't look scared at all. They're happy, full of life. Like in some of the stories.

Sheppard looks sharply at Oliver, noting the spark of hope in his eyes.

OLIVER (CONT'D)

That's how death should be. Not something to be feared.

After a beat Sheppard speaks, watching as the carts carouse overhead. When he speaks his voice is soft, guilty.

SHEPPARD

Well, tha's an interestin' way t'look at death, boy. With that in mind, hopefully ya won't be too mad with me for what I'm 'bout t'do.

Confused, Oliver turns. His eyes widen in horror to see a gun gleaming in the old man's hands.

OLIVER

What the--

Sheppard fires: the gunshot ECHOES through the night, and

Oliver falls.

SHEPPARD

I'm sorry. But no one can know of
this. Not even you, Oliver Mckay.

As Oliver dies, blood staining the sand, the little book
slips from his pocket, falling open to a dogeared page.

EXT. ARIZONA DESERT - DAY

A small, BLACK LEATHER BOOK lays abandoned in the Arizona
desert, open forever to one page. It rests by a large red
rock, the ground beneath red as well. Tire tracks fade into
the distance, where the sand is brown.

The wind WHISPERS through the scrub brush, and on it, a
VOICE. It is a peaceful voice, a soothing voice, neither man
nor woman:

DEATH'S PIPER (V.O.)

Under midnight stars and their
iridescence, you'll find the Plague
Parade in immortal dance, led by Those
of Death Do Us Part. Play on, Pied
Piper of Pestilence. Play on.

END