

NOT IN MY NIGHTMARE - SCENE 7

INT. ORGAN MUSIC

Owl Man, when listening to Baroque organ, had often wished for more fermata, more grand pauses, more Cyclopean eyes, all filled with silence as a relief from the inherent madness the wretched instrument so often produced even if the notes were put on paper or parchment by the greatest of the greatest and played by the best of the best. Even now, as Bach's modest "Sleepers, Wake," filled the cabin, Owl Man cringed. But the music was having the intended effect, as the sleepers woke. Now if only the music would go to sleep! As Owl was filled with this desire, it stopped. Blessed relief, as he announced out loud.

OWL MAN

Oh! Blessed relief!

HERON MAN

(Standing now,  
stretching his arms)

What's that, Owl? Relief from what?

OWL MAN

That infernal organ they call music,  
Heron.

HERON MAN

You must be hearing things, Owl.  
There's no organ music.

OWL MAN

No matter. Strange though. That organ  
music was playing while you were  
dreaming of Grace Slick. Why her,

Heron? I thought you were hankering after Helen. I heard it too. *White Rabbit*, it was, right alongside Bach. Strangeness indeed! But the words were different, Heron, still Lewis Carrollish, but different, to be sure. What is worse, you were singing, not like Grace, sad to say, and way off key.

HERON MAN

Haven't the slightest sense of what you are going on about, Owl. I've had no such dream!

OWL MAN

I particularly liked the lines you wrote, which you seemed to enjoy in full measure. You do not remember these words:

*When understanding and reason  
Are picked from the vine  
It's time for wine  
And a very good time*

HERON MAN

It's you that's dreaming, Owl; those are your words, not mine. Have you a secret stash of Macallan?

OWL MAN

Your memory is still sleeping, Heron. And, no, I've not been at the Macallan. But, you know, that's a great idea. Let's toast to sleeping memories and wandering dreams and composing words and music without regard to sense or whose is whose or where is where, or what is what.

HERON MAN

Can't say that makes anything clear, but no matter, a toast is a toast and always a joy to seal the deal with the greatest of single malts.

Russ, Paco, and Chip, roused by the Bach, were wandering a bit zombie-like around the cabin, cocking their heads a bit sideways as if trying to understand what they were hearing. Finally, Russ shouted, and this silenced everyone and brought all to attention.

RUSS

There's no scotch! What are you guys up to? In my neck of the woods, they'd call this toasting, without the actual liquid gold, *delusional*. That is my diagnosis. What do you make of this, Paco?

PACO

Clearly so, Russ. Two characters in search of Macallan. Simply delusional or play-acting or worse.

OWL MAN

You guys are the limit. I think you are jealous that we have Macallan to toast with and you didn't even write it! Careful now with your prejudicial diagnostics. Else we may just *stage exit* you!

HERON MAN

I second Owl's motion and call for a vote.

RUSS

A vote? You can't write narrative as if this was some kind of business meeting—whether high falutin' or low. Besides, you are just making stuff up!

HERON MAN

Hey Owl, I think our characters are stepping out of line. Isn't there a penalty for that?

PACO

Your characters? What kind of nonsense is this? You are our

characters. What kind of inversion of reality are you up to?

OWL MAN

Answer me this then. *Where* is narrative? We have narrative here, and there is Macallan here whether you see it or not, Russ, whether you control it or not, Paco. Don't you understand this? Once created, your characters and we characters are *free agents!* Surely, you must know this.

CHIP

Would you all just shut the fuck up? This is all crazy mutterin' far as I can tell.

Chip, now serving a term as the Voice of Reason, had barked out his sentiment and request like a dog, and everyone fell silent.

PROLOGUEAN VOICE

And so now you've had a peek, dear reader, behind the scenes, as it were, of what goes on in the construction of any narrative in words or whatever. No wonder so few writers, whether of poems or novels or screenplays or operas, ever finish anything. So many still-births! So much unfulfilled longing. Let's let our characters take a breather, regroup, and gather themselves up for the next round of Macallan, or not.

INT. STILL NIGHT. Faint hurdy-gurdy music, slow and funereal, has displaced Bach's "Sleepers, Wake." It had seemed like the eerie, Phantom-of-the-Opera organ music had whooshed and oozed from every corner, like Surround-Sound, whereas this funky hurdy-gurdy music, though it too will eventually come up the basement stairs, like every other spookiness, also sounds like it could be coming from a broom

closet just off the back porch. That's where the bears come to raid the garbage can, drawn by the wafting smells—if there are any, that is. One good thing we can always say about a hurdy-gurdy? You can carry it with you on a mysterious camping trip, unlike a pipe organ.

Meanwhile, a general, rumbling chatter fills the cabin. Everyone is talking at once, both invented characters and inventing characters. This new hurdy-gurdy music reminds us of a medieval ballad, judging from the whining scales arising from the instrument, with its hand-cranked rosin-wheel, two sets of resonating sympathetic drone strings and truncated keyboard keys.

Paco and Russ have fallen into an argument, as into a ditch, over the history of musical instruments, tinged with philosophical highlights. Ostensibly, they're trying to determine, on principle, which came first: the organ or the hurdy-gurdy, and furthermore, was the hurdy-gurdy "well-tempered," like Bach's clavichord or *klavier*, or not? Was Bach's great pipe organ well-tempered? Well, we can dispense with that right now: the pipe organ consists of a bunch of wind instruments, like a gang of piccolos, horns, and flutes. It's all wind-driven, so no tempering is needed. Guitars, lutes, and hurdy-gurdies have at least a few strings, so some tempering might be called for.

Heron Man even once declared in a lecture before The Royal Instrumentalist's Social Society, in London, that six-string guitars have something he calls "the Devil's String." It's the "open G-string." Why the Devil's string? Because it only reaches a true tone with fakery—it's never really in tune with its surrounding strings. Clearly, the Devil had a hand in its invention. The Devil also had a hand in inventing the G-string proper, i.e., the nearly non-existent garment often seen on modern beaches or around Hollywood swimming pools. Bach even wrote a piece called "Air on the G-string," but he was probably thinking of a different kind of string, not the beach kind, or the Devil's string, but the Angel's string.

The chatter continues, then bifurcates, as Owl Man and Heron Man decide to ignore the two writers, branching off on their own.

OWL MAN

Just ignore them, Heron Man. What a waste of good oxygen. They're winging

it, as usual. You'd think they're practicin' to go on that TV quiz show. You know the one I mean?

HERON MAN

Oh sure, Owl, I know the one you mean. You're talking about *So You Think You Can Dance*, right?

OWL MAN

Close, Heron Man, very close, except that ain't it at all. Nowhere near close, in fact. That dance thing's a *performance contest*, not a *quiz show*. In quiz shows, you have "contestants" that try to answer questions to win prizes. You know: cash prizes, boxes of laundry detergents, and for the big grand prize winners, let's say, maybe a Packard four-door. Or maybe a double-ended Studebaker. Or an Edsel.

HERON MAN

So, in other words, you're not talking about "Wheel of Fortune"?

OWL MAN

Nope.

HERON MAN

"The Price Is Right?"

OWL MAN

Nope.

HERON MAN

What about "Get Rich Quick"?

OWL MAN

Hell no, Heron Man. Are you listening, or are you pullin' my chain?

HERON MAN

Aw, hell no, Owl. You know me. I wouldn't do that.

OWL MAN

Yes, I do know you, Heron, and, I hate to say this, but I wouldn't put any chain-pullin' past you.

The Owl and the Heron continue their amiable but pointless dialogue about TV shows, while Russ and Paco dig a deeper hole in which to bury themselves as they pursue their similarly pointless argument. More to the point would have been some acknowledgment of the mounting volume of the seemingly out-of-place hurdy-gurdy. Whoever was "playing" the bizarre instrument was doing so while climbing up the stairs from the basement, which was spooky enough already, without the wheezy "voice" of the hurdy-gurdy to make it even spookier.

#### THE PROLOGUEAN VOICE

Perhaps you've noticed that, in my role as the Prologuean Voice, I have access to every facet of this story. I already know, for example, that Chip's twin brother, Chester, better known as "Chop," is the one mounting the stairs and playing the hurdy-gurdy. But how, you might ask, did Chop transport that odd, cumbersome instrument to the cabin, since Chip had arrived paddling his old aluminum canoe? Did Chop travel separately? I can affirm that, yes, he did. He drove up in his old 1928 Model-A Ford roadster, which his daddy gave to him before he (his daddy) died. It stopped running in 1942, and had sat in a barn for years. Little by little, parts went missing, while the rusting body, the upholstery, and engine wires, and so forth, were ravaged by mice, rats, and chickens—witness the feathers and droppings. Chop spent a year horse-trading with farmers, calling in favors, to assemble whatever parts were missing. ("I'll trade ya this-here exhaust manifold fer that-there clutch assembly.") Seems like every last one of them crusty old farmers had an old Model

A they kept in the barn for parts. But chop finally got the thing running—that's what he calls it now: "The Thing."

The basement door opens (again), and, true to the words of The Prologuean Voice, it was Chop. He had the hurdy-gurdy with him, half-dragging, half-shoving it through the narrow door opening. Once he'd gotten it into the living room, however, he placed it on a table surface with great care, as if it was the baby Jesus himself—still in his neonate form—being laid with reverence on clean straw. Unfortunately, there was still some residual imbalance in the mechanisms inside the hurdy-gurdy due to the awkward handling, so, when he set it down, that imbalance caused the rosin-wheel to rotate slightly, brushing against a bass string, and it let out a small, final sound, like a low-pitched gasp, almost, or even an exiting wheeze. Frankly, it sounded like a fart. Or, as the Germans like to say: *ein Furz*, *ein Pups*, or *ein Pupser*. Now the Scots, on the other hand, might have recourse to the magnificent, beautiful, economical word, *pump* (pron. "poomp").

DEPUTY PROLOGUEAN VOICE

*(interrupting)*

This just in! We interrupt this story to bring you thie following bulletin! Despite widespread popular use of the time-honored word, *pump*, our Scottish reporter on the scene in Glasgow, Andrew McMuggins, files this timely but shocking investigative report. [Reader discretion is advised.]

ANDREW MCMUGGINS, TV NEWS CORRESPONDENT

Thank you, Deputy Prologue Voice. Behind me you can hear the chants of irate Scottish citizens marching in protest against what they regard as the Google Corporation's "runnin' roughshod o'er our beloved Scottish traditions," according to one Artair Baird, a furious, fuming, and bitter dairy farmer from the highlands.

Reliable, enraged sources have informed me that, if you can believe it, The Google Corporation



has posted the following snippet on their website, in what they purport to be 'genuine Scottish dialogue,' as their way of spinning what they claim to be the delicate but universal topic of *flatus*: "Ooooh, more tea, vicar? I do hope it was not Elsie's small turnip scones that made you pass wind so fiercely." Can you believe that we have come to this? Does this Godzilla-like Google Corporation suddenly feel honor-bound by a trembling modesty that besmirches the historical record? Why should any proud Scot turn into a tight-ass, like a rubber balloon with its knot, just because Google says so? Why can't he just come right out and say, "pump," ("poomp") or, for a bit more *flair*, borrow from the German and say "pumpser" (pron. "poompser")? All loyal Scots would surely raise a hearty cheer, and a glass or two of single-malt while they're at it.

After all, to put the issue into perspective, our research department tells me that even Benjamin Franklin, one of colonial America's early geniuses, said: "Fart proudly." If a proud Ben Franklin can say that, why can't our typical proud Scot of today do a little *pumping* ("poomping") now and then? Protestors are wondering: Is there no Scottish pride left at all?

DEPUTY PROLOGUEAN VOICE

Thank you for that gripping, breezy report, Andrew. We look forward to your next update on these wind-breaking events. Stay tuned to the *Prologuean Report*. I'm your host, the Deputy Prologuean Voice. We'll be right back, after these words from our sponsors, The Macallan Society. [Fade to commercial.]

(meanwhile)

CHIP

Say hey, it's my twin-brother, Chop. That you, bro? Still with yer dang crank-organ or whatever you call it, eh? Thought you'da got rid of it by now. Guess yer never gonna learn, little bro.

CHOP

Chip, lemme turn that around fer ya. When're you ever gonna learn? I'm yer twin-brother, not yer little brother, didja forget? And I'll play old "Gertie" here whenever I please. [Here Gertie gives out one last tiny but emphatic wheeze, almost a "honk," as if in an affirmative response.]

CHIP

Now don't get all hot 'n' bothered, Chop. 'Member, I come outta mama first, so I got braggin' rights. But how in tarnation did you get into the basement with yer Gertie thing, without trompin' through here makin' a ruckus?

CHOP

That's easy, Chip. I come through that ol' storm door out back. Hasp's been busted fer years. But I'd be careful if I was you boys. And it ain't just the bears in these-here parts I'm worried about. There's *somethin' else* down there. Somethin' real spooky—

CHIP

Ho hum. We already know, Chop. First, it come, then it went. Spookiness all gone. Nothin' down there now. Some blue mist comes up, a-waltzin' through here, and three crows come a-marchin' in a circle, like they was about to attack us, or put us under a spell, like to hypnofry us or somethin' crazy. But that's all long gone. Now, I guess, "*Sheep may safely graze,*" as old man Bach used to say a while back.

CHOP

Oh, yeah? Well, think again, Chip. I seen it. Down there. A man, I 'spose. Coulda been close on seven feet tall, I reckon, 'less he had some of them elevator shoes. He was wearin' a long black cape, a black mask, and a funny hat. Had some kinda stick he was wavin' around. And them crows you was talkin' about? If they're the same ones from before, why, now they're sittin' on him. One on each shoulder, and one on his head. Kinda like the "head crow," I guess. Ha ha ha! Thought maybe he was some vampire, out fer blood, but he was busy lookin' into a broken mirror, tryin' to get his costume just right. But he sure looked mean. I said "hi" to him, but he just give me a dirty look and went back to his primpin'. Had to get the look right, I 'spose. I mean, if yer gonna be a spook-

Try as they might to keep arguing, Russ and Paco couldn't help but put it aside until later, distracted as they were by the arrival of Chop, his hurdy-gurdy, and his chilling tale of another spooky "something else" down in the basement. Again!

After hearing Chop's description, Russ whispered something to Paco, and they both climbed out of their "argument hole" and looked around. Owl Man, Heron Man, Chip, and Chop—fictional characters all—had glasses of what looked like real Macallan in hand, and were merrily settling into a liquified "single-malt analysis" of Chop's report about this latest Mysterious Other to appear *down below*, in the nether chamber beneath the cabin. Russ and Paco were both miffed.

RUSS

Hey! Where did you guys get that Macallan from? We didn't write up any Scottish single-malt, no aromatic, golden spirits. How are Paco and I supposed to fortify ourselves against this spooky thing Chop just reported, let alone put up with Chop's spooky hurdy-gurdy "music," without Macallan? Why didn't you pour some for us?

CHIP

You mean ya forgot, Russ? You tell him, Paco.  
I'm busy here. Now, Chop, as I was sayin'—

PACO

I think, Russ, Chip's talking about your earlier  
speech about the characters fiction writers  
invent that start getting all pumped up—oops! I  
mean, all inflated—and start doing what they  
dang well please. Like “free-agents,” helping  
themselves to some cask-aged Macallan.

RUSS

Sounds like you're getting entangled with Chip  
again, Paco. You start sounding like Chip, and  
you're liable to lose about a million brain  
cells per word.

PACO

I 'spose yer right, Russ. Now I gotta look out  
for entanglement with Chip, and with Chop to  
boot. 'Course, ya never know. Way my brain's  
been workin' lately, it just might help.