

James, Penda L. – Class #O80321

Week 2

Flash Fiction

8/21/2021

Logline: A woman, conflicted by her identity as the daughter of a former slave, must exploit her beauty and intellect to gain access to power and prestige.

Genre: Drama

Premise: This movie is about a biracial woman conflicted about her identity.

“His Remedy”

Alice’s body tenses as Paul raises his glass above her. Her heart beats against her chest; rhythms that under different circumstances could have been captured with her pen and inscribed on paper. Clear visions of New Orleans flooded her mind – dancers parading in Mardi Gras celebrations moving their jolly feet to the rhythm that her heart orchestrated: Thump. Thump. Thump. Thump, Thump. She could not feel her legs, let alone think about dancing. Nothing purple, green, or the thought of the *Fleur de Lis* gave comfort for her nausea.

“Paul, my mother and sister are in the other room. This is dreadfully embarrassing.”

His web of distorted love, spun over two years, stupefied her. Like a lioness hunting prey to feed her pride, he pursued her ferociously for two years through curvatures of ink from his letters. He fell in love with her picture in Boston Monthly Magazine in 1895 and knew in that moment, he wanted to get to know her. The first letter was delivered when her house was on fire.

With every letter, he sunk his incisors into the flesh of her heart. Such sweet words he penned, and Alice thinks back to one such letter:

“You were the sudden realization of an ideal.

Isn't there some hope for me?

I wish you could read my heart.

I love you.

I love you.

You bring out all the best that is in me.

You are an inspiration to me.

I am better and purer for having touched hands with you over all these miles.”

“Alice,” Mother had said of their courtship, “not him.” He was 22, she, a mere, 20, already published, building a name for herself as a writer. “He is but a poet,” she had sighed.

Alice was incapacitated by his words, but recognized, too late that her mother had been right. Sneaking off to meet with him and ignoring every warning, she accepted his mother’s wedding ring and gave him her heart in exchange. Engaged the first day they met. Now, in this moment, the question throbs in her head, “*Why didn't I listen to Mother?*”

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Alice had nurtured deep longings for her husband to right the wrongs of his indiscretion. The “*one night of folly*,” as he called it, had eroded her heart, stolen her innocence, and shattered her womanhood. She was blemished, yet married the man she loved.

Drawn back to the moment by his exasperated breaths, Paul’s outburst interrupts her thoughts, “Dammit Alice! Why must we fight?”

She thinks to herself, “*Because you are not acting like a man who loves his wife. Because you soothe the screams of your lungs with alcohol.*” Feeling tears well up in her eyes she swallows hard to force back the tears, “*He crawled to the bottom of that glass and drowned long before we met. What can save this poor soul? Surely, not I.*” Her eyes follow his glass to his lips, and he gulps bourbon. She tightens the fingers of her left hand around the legs of the chair, and it turns red from the pressure. As she braces for the impact, she knows is coming she hears his glass shatter and smells whiskey on the wall behind her.

Temporary relief.

There is no explanation for Paul’s anger. One could assume that it is self-rejection, anger or disappointment, but none of these adequately give an excuse for his beastly behavior toward his wife. His monstrous actions have led to this moment, the breaking point for Alice, and for Paul.

His feet at her stomach, Paul kicks her until he stumbles. Then he kicks her again and her vision blurs as she watches a leaf dance outside of the window into the darkness of her imagination. She hears Paul talking, but her ears are clogged with rage and fear. He kicks her until she is numb, disoriented, and no longer counting the strikes.

Old man winter in Washington, DC, was long gone in April, but when he visits, he stretches throughout the house frosting everything in his path. He seemed to awaken from his slumber long enough to blow a cold breeze through the house. Cold air seeps through the cracks in the floor. Alice can feel old man winter standing over her. He is cold, heartless, and ruthless. Yet, he does not compare to the frozen heart of the man who hates Alice – but professes, as her husband, to love her deeply. Alice yearns to give him healing deeply; but has grown tired of him. Tired of Mother Dunbar whose presence overshadows her existence and mixes with the hatred of her son. Tired of living a lie, “*We will never become The Brownings.*”

Paul wants the love of his mother and the approval of his people. Her people. Their people. People who applaud and cheer when it is for their benefit, but who take no interest in the truth behind the one who creates what they eagerly consume. Unspoken words, written between the lines they read with such enthusiasm, fall on their blind eyes.

When the kicks stop Alice comes back to herself. The pain in her stomach shoots up her body causing her to grimace. Paul, exhausted from his performance is strewn across the bed, asleep. Alice gathers her strength to move and does so as gingerly as her pain-wracked body will allow. Leaning heavily on the bulwark of the chair, it becomes her confidante as she stands.

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With tears burning her eyes, Alice declares to herself, *“I will save my soul and my tattered life tonight. Mother Dunbar can heal her wretched son. I do not have his remedy. Four years of this existence is too hard a burden to bear. I must love him from a distance.”*