

“FINAL COPY”

A SHORT PLAY BY SAM GRABER

ESTIMATED RUN TIME – 8 MINUTES

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SUMMARY

An obituary writer becomes cursed with the ability to see direct into the hearts and minds of human atrocity.

CHARACTERS

CRIMSON ANGEL, any gender, any age.

TIME

The present.

SETTING

The setting is light, the kind of light that provides the right lens to capture the detail of a waking dream.

FIRST PERFORMANCE

Final Copy was first performed by Pulp Theater in Portland, OR during June 2013 as directed by Matt Haynes, and starring Allison Anderson, Otniel Henig, Jonathan Owicki and Lily Warpinski.

THE PLAY.

CRIMSON ANGEL stands erect, attentive.

CRIMSON ANGEL

I write obituaries. That is to say I write obituary copy for the deceased. Not necessarily for the deceased but for the newspaper. I mean I don't write for the newspaper, I write for the deceased for the newspaper. And even then I really don't write for the deceased, I write *about* the deceased. For the family. I've never been comfortable talking about myself. Perhaps that's obvious. Discussing myself sounds so much better when getting discussed by myself, alone, in my small apartment in the rainy city.

I like writing obituaries. Writing obituaries is helpful. Grieving families shouldn't be burdened by added distress over exacting prose, especially with my editor. He's a bit harsh. Certainly harsher than necrology. Even the most leviathan of endings are for the most part tame. People die mostly of old age or disease. Anyway, I like writing obituaries. I'm good at it. And no one complains.

Except for the night I had the first dream. It wasn't an ordinary dream. It was the kind of dream which plays out like a full movie. The kind of dream after which you wake to find the entire night passed in an instant. Dawn arrived blood-skied and I woke remembering in crystal clarity a benign man who was convinced by an unseen force to commit a ghastly murder. This benign man in the movie dream tore apart an enemy's body and couldn't contain his mortifying crime and ended up confessing his atrocity, only to run from authorities, screaming, until becoming trapped in a dark, underground stairwell where snakes got dumped onto him and bit off all his fingers. This deluded man in a stairwell, screaming, with snakes clinging to the tips of ten fingers.

I awoke, terrified. How could my mind produce such horror? I don't deal with horror, I deal with the deceased. My body trembled with convulsions. My clothes were damp with sweat. I detected pinchings on my arms and crenellations in my legs; what were my fingers doing while I dreamt? I couldn't stay. I had to leave, to escape, to walk the streets and contemplate the meaning of this movie-dream and its palpable residue on my body. That's when I realized my right eye had become blurry. I couldn't see out of my right eye, a condition which did not abate that full day I spent alone in my small apartment in the rainy city.

CRIMSON ANGEL [CONT.]

The next night the dreams returned. I beheld a second dream about a son who burned his own mother for an inheritance. And the following morning, even blurrier vision. The dreams went on and on, the customary mood and tone of each a hideous death, with vividness of victims, all followed by increased blurriness in my right eye, a sort of nightmare-gone-real cataract.

I wish to tell you now about the final dream, the most disturbing of the sequence of dreams. The final dream regarded a young girl who choked on scaly food in the back of a contemptible restaurant. The girl didn't die from choking, but suffered her fatality from cerebral hypoxia because the restaurant manager refused to call the ambulance for fear of liability and by the time another patron made the emergency call and the paramedics arrived the girl regained minimal brain function for a brief minute until sputtering in her parents' arms into permanent sleep.

When waking this time I didn't feel horror. I didn't feel spasms of vulnerability from the pinchings on my arms, vagueness in my eye. I felt vengefulness. A strange feeling but not foreign, similar to those rudimentary reactions I have felt when learning of fresh death and wanting to fit blame neatly between the periods and commas of my initial obituary.

I knew what had to be done. I left my small apartment. I stumbled, holding my right eye, all the way through the rainy city to the newspaper office. At my desk my fingers scribed an obituary for the little girl and were not kind in attributing blame on the restaurant manager. The newspaper editor was furious because no death had actually occurred, and also because the restaurant was a principle advertiser of the paper. The editor called my obituary sick, twisted. I was to write copy only *after* someone's death. I tried telling the editor about my eye, and the dreams, how I now considered them prophetic visions. The editor told me to leave and never come back. I felt abandoned. I couldn't leave. This is who I am. This is who I'm becoming. The editor was hysterical, calling me a murderer. He moved to grab me, to physically push me, but there was no touch on my skin. The editor's harsh hands, trying to shove me, there was no sensation. I felt nothing except vengeance for this little girl to whom harm had only come in my sleepless mind.

CRIMSON ANGEL [CONT.]

The newspaper submits final copy to a printing house in digital file. It was a matter of accessing that file. So I did what any rational, one-eyed death dreamer would do. I went to the printing house. They were unimpressed by my credentials, skeptical of my presence, but I assured them that any obituary writer who takes to personally showing at the printing house is virtue incarnate. And virtue in this case was avoiding mistake on final legacy. The printer relented. I infused final copy right there on the press: how a restaurant manager died of cerebral hypoxia after choking on a rat in the back of his blackened kitchen.

The manager of the restaurant died the next day. I know he died because I was there to watch it happen. The little girl didn't know what was going on. She was at her table, between her parents, innocently eating ice cream. I kept the rat.

As my right eye deteriorated to full crimson, I began to see clearly, my waking vision replaced by the dreams. I saw faces in their finality: the tortured by jungle fighters, the protester by corrupt police, the innocent by incensed terrorists. Yes, I saw not just the victims, I saw those responsible. I saw evil hearts flushed with revolting jealousy. I saw minds engorged with fury. I saw those responsible and I wanted to tear *their* eyes out, to claw *their* bodies, to rip apart whatever held *their* life together so that they could know the families left behind, so that they could smell the victims, taste the dirt in the coffins, read my printed words of pain. It was oppressive, maddening, the endless nightmares that let me see straight into each abject heart with no detainment, no holdback to the direct workings of vicious souls.

What I saw I already knew, what the rainy city speaks in constant. Empathy has been washed away. People still see and they still hear but they don't feel. Empathy is a chasm between who we once were and our much-hurried feet pushing puddles of city rain towards the gutter.

When the dreams come I know what to do. The print shops all look the same, their fading roofs, their backyard scraps, their lightly-locked back doors. But in those rare moments when I am unable to infiltrate, and have no way to insert final copy, in those instances before the sun supplants the wilting harbinger of death's vision, vengeance must be executed in any way possible.

*CRIMSON ANGEL is now fully hunched,
leaning on a walking staff in one hand.*

*The other hand holds a small cage with rat
inside.*

CRIMSON ANGEL [CONT.]

I have taken to the earth, moving through the world by crimson sight to do what I can. The dreams are the now only joy I know. We all need joy in our lives.

Otherwise, without joy, we feel overtaken by something we can never control.

END OF PLAY.