



Narrator

Debt and desperation clouds your judgment.

You let the boss insult your pride at a meeting, because the rent is due. You go along with a decision that may hurt the business or its customers long-term because you're hungry, because you can't feed your kids without your paycheck. You hate your job, but the money is just good enough that you know finding something else may take more work and time than you have at the moment. The lights have to stay on.

Then somebody comes along and says they may have something you'd want to see.

In the last episode, John watched as Joanna, his employer and former lover brought in a duffle bag filled with cash for a client that would be arriving in five days. A client that is paying seven figures for a procedure that will better prepare him for the end of his life.

There is one issue. The client's famous. Very famous.

Despite the protests of John and her cousin, Joanna is going full speed ahead.

Deciding to take a moment to himself, John arrived at a bar where a familiar voice startled him... and a long-missing face brought tidings he was never expecting. Greg, Joanna's prodigal brother, had returned. Greg asked John to keep his secret, and offered a chance to find out what he's been up to... John had a choice.

You made it. And now Witchever Path presents SECOND COURSE, Part TWO – Prodigal Son.

[sound barn door, cows mooing]

JOHN

[narrate]

Most clients are afraid and respectful when they come up here.

We don't attract skeptics. The nature of the business means you have to seek it out.

Still, some clients scoff at the way we live when they first come onto the farm.

There is a conceit when you're that rich or powerful, that your secret hideaways or clandestine sin gardens are palaces. Decadent, and fucking expensive.

The family house is nice, but it's no mansion.

The animals grazing in the pasture are quaint, but there's no riding stable. No pool.

Our scenery tends to bring the asshole out of more than a few of them.

"This is not what I was expecting."

"Is this it?"

"What do you spend our money on?"



Little secret for all the working-class white people: we're all trash to them. All of us. They don't care who you vote for, or who you punch to preserve the wet dream that one day you'll be one of the elite. They do not want you. You're not invited to the party. But they are not gods. They fear what comes next just as much as the next piece of trash.

The walk through the pasture always brings these assholes to heel.
You can feel the last remnants of their disdain and doubt fade away as they walk past the hay and tractors, toward the tall, ancient barn, its open loft looking like a single, hateful eye. I started calling it the Cyclops since the pandemic hit. Guy and the cousins liked it. Joanna did not.

The Cyclops' size is a shock to many- they almost never notice it through the apple trees when they come up the drive. Only one ever did.

Joanna usually gives some speech that hints at the ritual they're about to undertake as we get to the barn door. She's taken to offering them a chance to turn back and be driven home, cash still in hand. Nobody takes her up on that.
We slide open the door, and Joanna orders them inside.

The Mouth of the Cyclops.

And from then out, it all goes the same way.

They all do what Joanna tells them to do.
An animal is fed, then slaughtered. We're paid, and the clients leave.
We bury their secrets, we count our money, and we wait to do it again.

Today's chores are to clean out the barn before Friday's job. I hate doing this job alone. I can still hear the screams, gunshots, and frightened animals whenever I walk inside. I see that thin little asshole, in his combat boots and nice suit, smiling. Driving his knife into me while I fight him off. His sour fucking voice apologizing for the violence he was happily carrying out. I'm not weak, but in the years since then, I know the truth. That little man would have killed us all.

I power wash the barn floor, the dark red stains of the past two weeks becoming a pink stream flowing into the drain. I feed Pickle and Daisy, our two new Highland cows, some new hay. The work helps distract me. I give Daisy a playful scratch and turn to leave. and nearly trip over something.

[boot hits knife]



What the fuck?
It's his knife.
O's fucking knife.
The blade is rusty, like it's been left out in the woods.
Who fucking brought this in here?

[chirp]
Guy, who's been in the Cyclops today? Over.

GUY
[on the walkie]
What?

JOHN
The barn. Who's been up here?

GUY
Joanna was up there yesterday.
I think she wanted to find some more cords for the house.
Why?

JOHN
Just found...
... a fucking mess.
Listen, I'm going to call it a day.
I want to see some old friends.

GUY
[a little surprised at that]
All right, bud. But let's get started early tomorrow. Friday's coming fast.

JOHN
Hear that.

JOHN
[narrate]
I pull onto Myrtle Street in Manchester an hour later.
The red glow of the sun is muted against the clouds. I won't see stars tonight.
The big, brick tenement buildings haven't seen any renovations for the last twenty years, and had it not been for the fire that almost burned them all down, they wouldn't have even had that. When I grew up nearby, this area was mostly Irish and dying French people. Now it's mainly Cape Verdean, Indian, and other people that talk radio complains about.



I park on the street and see Greg, waiting for me on the sidewalk by the granite steps in front of a security door.

Greg

[a bit more serious, but pleasant]

Glad you made it, bud.

Did you come alone?

JOHN

[annoyed]

It's just me.

What are we doing here?

GREG

[calm]

I'm here to visit an old friend of my dad's.

JOHN

[put upon]

Fucking... Greg.

What is it with your family?

I'm here to talk, and then you spring this on me?

GREG

[pushing back a bit]

I asked if you'd come help me with something. This is it.

There's an old woman up there, dying.

She knew my father.

And she needs my help.

JOHN

[disgusted]

Another scumbag.

Except this one gets delivery service instead of coming to the farm.

GREG

[hating that]

No. Not even close.

Come in with me, and it's going to make sense.



[BUZZ OF THE SECURITY DOOR]

[SOUND OF Footsteps up the door]

GREG

[try recording this while sounding like going up the stairs]

We're headed to the fifth floor.

[pause]

The lady we're going to see is eighty-three.

She worked with my father when he was in Joanna's position.

JOHN

[confused]

Help him how?

GREG

People would find Dad almost the same way they find us now.

But it wasn't really a business the way we - the way *Joanna* does things.

Dad ran a farm to make a living.

What we did to help people is just part of who we are.

And Mary-Ellen was someone he'd talk to so he knew he was helping the right folks.

JOHN

[unconvinced]

She was a private eye?

GREG

Ex-nun.

She was excommunicated.

JOHN

[horrified]

Jesus. What the fuck did she do?

GREG

[calm]

That's what we're here to find out, man.



JOHN

[narrate]

I smell curry chicken when we pass the third floor, and my stomach rumbles. But thinking about the potential shit I'm about to hear, my appetite quickly disappears. The walls are filthy. Whoever owns these buildings now is definitely just collecting rent and ignoring the upkeep.

There's a fight happening on floor four, two women, from what I can tell. I don't know the language. I don't need to know one of them is likely going to storm out. We're almost at our destination when a young woman comes out into the hallway, curses out the person inside and storms down the stairs.

Fuck.

[knocks on the door]

[sound of coughing]

[door cracks open]

MARY ELLEN

Yes?

GREG

[to Mary Ellen, with compassion]

Mary-Ellen Dubois?

MARY-ELLEN

[a little funny]

Yes?

[coughing]

Who are you?

GREG

I'm Dennis's son, Greg.

Do you remember me?

MARY-ELLEN

[confused, wheezing]

Oh, Gregory... you got tall.



[looks at John]
Are you one of Dennis' boys, too?
[coughing]

JOHN
[confused]
What?
No, I'm not...

GREG
[interrupting]
May we come in?

[door opens]

JOHN
[narrate]
The apartment smells like urine, cat and human.
I don't see a cat anywhere, though.
There's a statue of the Virgin Mary, stained yellow by nicotine, standing on a cabinet opposite the door. The small kitchenette opens up into a living room, filled with bookcases that look like they haven't been touched for a decade.
Mary-Ellen shuffles over to a well-worn arm chair, her shaky hands slowly reaching for the arms.
I notice the oxygen tank next to it.
Greg and I help her sit down. Her fingers fumble for her oxygen tube, and we help her with it. I think of my grandmother toward the end in this moment, as this frail woman with disheveled gray hair accepts our help and taps my hand.

MARY-ELLEN
Thank you, boys.

GREG
[compassionate]
Is there anything you need before we start?

MARY-ELLEN
[thoughtful]
Is my rosary all right to hold during this?

JOHN
[unsure]
You're asking me?



GREG

It's okay, ma'am. You can do that.
Let me get out what I need.

[rummages through bag]

GREG

[to John]

John, can you get that tv tray over here?
We'll need it. And – uh – Ma'am, can we use one of your plates?

MARY-ELLEN

Oh Sure, let me...

GREG

No. We can get it. Just tell us where.

JOHN

[narrate]

She points to a cabinet in the kitchenette and I get the plate, placing it on the tray in front of her.

Her skin's so paper thin on her hands. She's going to bleed so much.

The older clients always do.

It's one thing to do this in the barn.

I imagine what my mugshot will look like.

But whatever this old woman's done, she likely deserves what's coming.



Greg unwraps the unsliced loaf of bread and places it on the plate in front of Mary Ellen. I've seen this a hundred times before. The knife comes out of his pocket. She'll be cut and confess while tearing the bread to pieces. But where our clients usually are forced to cut themselves...

Greg gently cuts her finger tip. Her rosary, held in her left hand, clatter against the tray.

MARY-ELLEN

Ooh. Well, that didn't hurt hardly at all.

GREG

[being kind, chuckling lightly]

I'm relieved, Mary-Ellen.

Are you ready to tell me about this?

MARY-ELLEN

I lived with another woman for thirty years, knowing that it was a sin in the eyes of the Lord. My love died without repenting, and I had broken my vows of chastity to be with her, here in our home. I am unashamed, and I miss Siobhan more than I worry about Hell.

But I made a vow, one of three that I swore to God, only to forsake all of them.

JOHN

[narrate]

The first confession is usually the client testing the water. They tell you the little things. "I stole. I ran over a dog and kept driving... then they'd start down the path of something worse. I hit my wife, one time I walked into my sister's room and..." That was the launchpad into the stuff you try to black out of your memory or focus so you don't reach out and choke them to death.

But Mary-Ellen, old woman that she is, is admitting a sin that is really, what?

Being gay when it was illegal?

She bought into the church so goddamn much that even being out of it, she thinks she'll burn. I look at her walls while she keeps going. St. Sebastien, Joan of Arc, White Jesus. There's iconography above every bookshelf. I hate myself. Don't get me wrong.

But I don't take comfort in the things that led me to it.

I don't have pictures of my exes over my bed.

MARY-ELLEN

I blasphemed the all-mighty, our Father, cursing his name over how the Bishops and Cardinals told us in the convent to take in that first poor girl, first of many, to help her at the appointed time to bring a baby into this world, and give it, still screaming and needing it's unwilling mother, to a couple who paid for the baby and the discretion.

And then again, from the same parish came another girl whose sin was not her own, and the police and the family and the priests were all of the same mind. Make it all go away, and then it happened again, and the pattern of abuse became almost ritualistic, to the point of being Satanic. And when Father Martineau showed up that day to baptize the child... when the girl looked at Father Martineau with such fear... I knew then what had to be done.



JOHN

[narrate]

Her hands bled over the white bread, onto the plate. Drip after drip coming at the speed of her confession. A confession not of her own cruelty, but one of a duty and promise to do fucking nothing. To let a man, a fucking terror, do whatever he wanted under the guise of shepherding a flock.

MARY-ELLEN

She asked if she'd be able to go back to school one day.
She missed her friends.

JOHN

I looked at Greg, my blood boiling. I knew what was coming and when she continued to confess, I wanted him to look at me. I felt a searing pain in my side. The scar from where O nearly gutted me. My mouth began to water. Mary-Allen's confession began to be drowned out by the sound of blood in my ears. And Greg, Greg nodded at her, but his eyes were not his own. Instead of those sad, brown eyes , there was only a black void.

Greg

It's okay, Sister Mary-Ellen. Let it out. Let it come out of you.

MARY-ELLEN

Father Martineau would get away with it. It was the 80s, they would move him. He would do it again. Likely, he'd done it throughout the diocese and wherever else he came from before. He'd be allowed to repent. It wasn't boys, was the refrain from the bishop, but it was embarrassing. Hiding the recorder within the rectory had been difficult, but technology had gotten so much smaller in those days. And I had his wickedness and crimes on tape.

Had a reporter from the Globe willing to hear it.
And then I heard... I heard of another girl. One ...

[really upset]

Oh my God, Oh my God forgive me.

GREG

You need to let it out.

MARY-ELLEN

I found out her name, and the reporter and I... we talked to her family. We convinced them to do the thing for which I'd be damned for eternity... We took her to Boston.
She was just



JOHN

[narrate]

It hangs in the air, like a mist; the crime, and the age of the victim, and the one thing the Church doesn't forgive in this modern era is said out loud in this room.

And she begins coughing. Her hand arcs in the air, and the blood from her finger hits my face, and my vision starts to blur. What is happening?

GREG

Is that all?

MARY-ELLEN

Yes.. Yes.

GREG

I accept the weight, Sister Mary-Ellen.

I can't say he will forgive you, but I can promise you will not burn.

I accept your sins.

[chewing through this]

JOHN

[narrates]

The old lady goes into a coughing fit and I help steady her. Greg hands me gauze and I wrap her finger. She looks at me, with half-lidded eyes.

She's exhausted. I don't think she's lost too much blood, but the toll of all of this is affecting her.

My jaw is tight, I'm having a hard time concentrating.

MARY-ELLEN

[out of breath]

Thank you.

I'm all right.

JOHN

You're a brave woman.

MARY-ELLEN

I'm all right.

JOHN

[narrates]

She starts to nod off. I find a neck pillow next to her chair and slide it around her shoulders. She is fully unconscious before my hands leave her.



I turn to whisper at Greg, but then I see him devouring the wet bread the way the animals on the farm do. His eyes are a swirling abyss, like the one in the eyes of the Squirrels. Like Robert. Like the wet dark that came into the barn.

And I feel something tug in my chest toward him, toward the plate.
My stomach begins to growl, the world is swimming.

GREG

[starting to finish the meal]
I can't stop you.
You feel it like I do.
But if you do this, everything changes.

NARRATOR

What do you think's going to happen here?

Will John

EAT SOME OF THE BREAD?
RUN OUT OF THE APARTMENT
WATCH GREG FINISH

Whatever's going to happen, you've got to make it happen.
Go to WitcheverPath.com/vote.

You have one week, until November 30, to decide.

SECOND COURSE - PRODIGAL SON was written by Steven and Journee.
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The Witchever Path Theme Song is by RYDR.

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It is Coming, by Daniel Fridell
Rise from the Shadows - Hampus Naeselius
An Obsession by Dayon
The Pulse of My Heart - Pearce Roswell
Misty Land by Headlund



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