



Narrator

John has been watching the elite pay a premium price for salvation for years. They come to New Hampshire ready to pay a pretty penny to find a definitive absolution before dying.

And John has stood by, hating every rich person he's had to hear recite their crimes over an offering of bread and blood and something... darker.

The orchestrator of this service is a woman he loved.

The woman who pays his salary, ruling that farm with an iron fist.

But what they do, the filth they hear, has weighed on him for a long time.

Now his employer's brother is back. The formerly kind hearted soul has offered John a chance to change how business is done, to stop feeding that growing darkness. A chance to provide a redemptive service only to the dying, and only to those the family should deem worthy.

John considered Greg's offer before going home. But when he got there, the darkness of the farm swirled about him. Fear gripped his heart, and he heard the voice of a long dead enemy. He found a surprisingly sympathetic and thoughtful Joanna, who let him know she was nearly ready to stop the business of Sin Eating on this farm for good. And that she missed him.

The two embraced and after a night of reconnected passion, John was unsure which side he wanted to be on. Helping to depose his former (or perhaps current) lover and let her brother take the farm over, or to stay the course and see if she means what she said.

He didn't know what to do. And for most of the week, you the audience went back and forth on who to choose. By just three votes, the die is cast.

Wichever Path presents part four of SECOND COURSE: Thirty Pieces

JOHN

[narrates]

Guy listens to me as I explain what Greg's been up to since he left the farm. I tell him about the clients he's visited, how those that were alive seemed to be up to the same old shit they were up to before they came here. How he came to the conclusion that the old ways were better. I tell him about Mary-Ellen, and the way Greg ate the blood-soaked bread. How she fell asleep peacefully, and how I didn't think she'd be waking up. I don't tell him about his black eyes, I don't mention the dark...or what I wanted to do.

He takes it all in, just nodding, then he asks me for Greg's number.



[to Guy]

Oh, that's fucking great! So you're in?

GUY

I know he told you to convince me, and I like you, bud.

But I'm family.

He shoulda come to me.

[Sighing] We gotta meet face-to-face.

JOHN

Okay. When do we head out?

GUY

We? Non, John. Me. I got things to say to him.

Man to man, you know?

I'll tell him to meet me for lunch.

You just do your job like you're supposed to. OK?

JOHN

[narrate]

We finish pounding in the torches, and I fill them all with lighter fluid.

He excuses himself for the call. Looking up at the house, I see Jo's out on the porch, smoking.

I start toward her but think better of it.

Going up there right now would be a mistake.

I pat my coat and take out O's trench knife.

Time to figure out how this got in the barn.

Without a word to anybody else, Guy hops into his truck and takes off.

As he drives off the property, I circle around the barn,
past the rusted out tractor whose husk obscures the small trail that leads to the farm's back 50.

There are some spots back here where I can see where deer and small game have been running
around. I make note of the new trail cameras out here. Added security for Friday, I assume.

Next year, the sheep and goats will graze in this field, giving the front pasture a little bit of a
rest. That is, if Greg is going to keep this place running at all.

After a quarter mile, I'm next to the little stone wall that surrounds the family plot. I step over
it, and make my way to the grove of birch trees that serve as headstones.

There are no names on the trees. But the youngest, closest to the wall, is an eighteen-foot
white birch. That's where Greg and Joanna's father is buried. I'd gone out here once with Jo



during the pandemic. She left flowers at the foot of the tree, said something in French that sounded both sad and angry, and we stood there, holding hands in silence for a few minutes.

But it's not just family out here.

I head over to a mound near one of the older trees, under which we'd buried the remains of the man who'd come to kill us all. The first client I'd ever seen confess.

He's been in the ground for almost four years.

But this knife in my pocket, it was supposed to be under this tree, with him.

Most of the grass and earth looks undisturbed until I spot a fist-sized hole, with dirt piled up in front of it. I crouch down, and I look inside.

It's been dug recently, at a sharp, downward angle. The earth's pretty wet and densely packed.

I can make out the grooves in the hole pretty clearly. Something long was dragged out of it.

The fucking trench knife, but who would have done it?

HIS voice echoses out of that tiny hole

O

I can just tell people what to do, and they do it. [laughs]

Like you, John.

[squirrel chittering]

[to O]

You're dead. You're not talking to me.

[squirrel shriek]

[sound of animal racing out of the hole]

[narrate]

Fuck!

Something flies out of the hole at me and instinctively I shield my eyes.

I feel tiny, razor sharp teeth biting into my left hand. I grab at the fucking furious ball of fur, and try to pull it off me. It's clawing at my fucking palm and keeps biting.

[to the squirrel]

[Screaming and swearing]

[narrate]

I find its neck and squeeze, hearing a tiny crack.



Its body goes limp and I drop it to the ground.
It's a fucking squirrel.

Fucking A. It's a fucking squirrel.

I look over its limp body. It's a big one... maybe three pounds, big scar across its snout.

[hissing through pain]

Oh, he fucking got me good. They don't live too long, but I know, I can feel it, that this is one of the squirrels from the night O died.

I pick it back up and inspect it carefully.

I think the way O screamed when he was chased by Robert.

But looking at this plump, dead thing... knowing what I heard from the hole.

I want to see if there's some part of O hiding inside. Something in me opens my (its? our?) jaws and I bring the dead rodent to my mouth.

JOHN

What am I doing?

[narrate]

I toss the fucking thing as far as I can.

I need to get out of here. This is insane.

My hand throbs as I stumble all the way back past the barn.

The blood is seeping through my fingers in a steady trickle.

I make it to the backdoor through the kitchen, passing some of the guys.

I don't bother nodding or responding to their questions.

I get into the bathroom, I close the door, and I run my hand under the tap.

I reach into the medicine cabine.

I need bandages, I don't want to see my face.

I can't risk staying here any longer.

I grab my keys as I pass Randy.

He tries to tell me that Jo wants to see me, but I nearly shove him over when he gets in my way to see if I'm paying attention. I leave the property with him shouting after me.

And I spend the next nine hours in the Emergency room, six of which I'm waiting to be seen.

My phone's been vibrating every ten minutes. I ignore every call and text that comes in.

This place is everything the farm is not, and I'm grateful.

The scent of vomit powder, latex, and hand sanitizer; they are all comforting.

There's an older woman watching a documentary on the dead Queen at full blast in the room next to me as I wait for my stitches.

I'm offered the television while I wait, and I say yes.

The first thing that's on is proof that God exists, and that he's fucking with me.



The Client

You were looking for the heir to the throne, Erastes.
[self satisfied]
Well, here I am.

ERASTES

[in a raspy angry faux-British Voice]
Malabar!
You're supposed to be -

The Client

Dead?
Next time you send assassins,
perhaps find ones that aren't so easily distracted by women and wine.
I mean, at least I've built up a tolerance!

ERASTES

[growling in disbelief]
You'll not escape me this time, halfblood!
Kinfolk, bring me his head!

[roar of fighting and cinematic music]

JOHN

[narrate]
And there's Friday's client, in one of his blockbuster franchise movies.
The Bandits of Evermoon.
I fucking *loved* this movie when I was fresh out of high school.
He's just eating up the scenery, being a cross between Aragorn and David Bowie.
It's one of the last movie series with mainly all practical effects.
The fight scenes are amazing.
His rubber-faced reactions when things don't go according to plan, ah, it's *still* my shit.

The Client

[gaining the upperhand]
Enough of this, Erastes!
Lay down your arms, and we can put an end to this!

ERASTES

NEVER! The Kingdom and Lady Clitasia shall be mine!

[more fighting]



JOHN

[narrate]

When the doctor comes in, he sews me up slowly so the two of us can watch the Client in his most memorable role dispatch the big bad before escaping with his sidekick. The doctor can't believe it was a squirrel that got me when I tell him, but at least it means I don't need a rabies shot. He gives me some percocet and antibiotics, just in case.

As Malabar gets attacked at the cliffhanger, there's a quick shot of his eyes wide with terror. The client was so good... I really don't want to know what he did to make him come to see us.

[sound of the car as he's driving home]

I swallow the pills while driving back to the house. It's not until I jump out of the cab of the truck that I start to feel the earth lurch and shift beneath my feet. I send Guy a photo of my hand and let him know to call me first thing. The smell of frost is in the air. Sleeping in the car is tempting, but its way too suspect right now. We're all on edge.

Time to go inside

[front door opens]

JOANNA

You weren't answering your phone!
What happened to you?

JOHN

This.

JOANNA

Randy said you looked hurt.
Why didn't you say anything?

JOHN

I don't talk when I'm hurt if I can help it.
I pissed you off earlier today, and – you know, I'll stop right there.
You were calling, I didn't pick up. That was a mistake, but I got stitched up and I'm ready to do what I have to do to make this right.

JOANNA

Were you cut in the barn?



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JOHN

[laughs]

Bit by a squirrel.

And I'm relieved to see that's freaking you out as much as it does me.
It got me out by your family plot.

...Hey Jo, it was one of them.

From that night.

JOANNA

Wha- I don't think so, John.

We got nearly all of them. And squirrels don't live that long.

JOHN

It was living in a hole in the ground, right above his grave.

So, let me ask you. Why would it choose there?

JOANNA

How the fuck should I know?

JOHN

I think you do...

It's the fact he didn't confess all of sins, right?

That's what makes the animals like that.

It's what tell the clients. They get filled with the Dark.

They're filled with the dark, they eat the clients' sins,

but if they get a whiff that's there more to eat.

They go nuts.

JOANNA

The Dark?

Who.. are you high?

JOHN

Yes. Painkillers. I'd be hiding from you right now if I wasn't on them.

So, I'm going to ask you again. The Dark. What is it?

JOANNA

You're out of your mind. Go sleep this off, John.

Tomorrow's the last day we have to get this right.



JOHN

We never even talk about it. Not even when we were... together
We don't talk about how you opened the door, and the darkness came into the barn.
Then you had me and Guy bury O after I got out of the hospital. And we did everything you
asked. Stood by you for years. You and me? We were going to get married!
But we never talk about the Dark.

[Weary.]

Before Friday happens, what did I see?

JOANNA

You didn't see anything.

JOHN

Then why do the animals go nuts when they eat the bread?

JOANNA

[Exasperated] The bread is drugged, John.
The animals go nuts when they eat it.
It gets into the clients' bodies when they tear it up.
They're tripping balls.
It makes the whole thing scary, dramatic, and unpredictable enough to put on a show.

JOHN

Wait. You're gonna try that? Try to convince me it's bullshit?
What about the way your dad did it?

JOANNA

It's not worth it how he did it, John.

JOHN

You're lying. I've heard O. I saw -

JOANNA

What did you see?

JOHN

I.. I saw Gre—I saw Robert's eyes... change.
So, all of this is just fucking theater?
I have to listen to them say all this fucked up shit, for what?
For you to make money?



JOANNA

It's a con!

Of all the assholes who come here,
You ever seen a single person we've helped that needed it?
They're monsters.

JOHN

Says the person who gives them a rubber stamp to go out and do it again.

JOANNA

I make them fucking pay!
More than anyone out there, John!
These people own the cops, they own the system.
They don't go to jail!
So I make them pay. I make them pay and then they'll still be damned for what they're doing.

JOHN

But your family didn't do it for that, not this way.
I thought you were supposed to help people who thought they couldn't be forgiven.
Was that all bullshit, too?

JOANNA

You're fucking high, lecturing me on how I shouldn't lie to rapists and traffickers and murderers.

JOHN

[Pushing] How the fuck do you make them pay if they just get to go out and do it again?

JOANNA

I record everyone who confesses, John. Every single one of them.
Insurance in case we get someone like O, or in case we need a favor.
So here's what we're going to do. You're going to go to bed, then you're going to take a day off
to collect yourself, away from this fucking place before coming back to help me with the last
client I'm ever going to have.

Then I never want to see you again.

JOHN

JO.

JOANNA

You don't get to call me that. Fuck you.



[storms off, door slams]

JOHN

[narrate]

Once the adrenaline wears off, it's just the pills and anxiety keeping me up.

The next four hours, I keep the lights on in my room. She's lying to me. Still. They can't really be faking all of this. I saw what I saw. I never once touched the bread. The dark is real. It's real.

And if Greg is right, it's only getting larger.

The thought of it is too much. I put on the television, and there's the client, playing Malabar LeMoineau, the rogue of Evermoon. It's probably the third movie, this time. His sly grin and wink as he leads a band of misfits against the might of some mystical warlord. He's pirouetting and dancing through the warriors with a cool panache. I wish I could be as cool as Malabar. But the client isn't Malabar. He's an actor. And now he's coming here, allegedly dying... and looking to unburden his soul.

I google his name with the word allegations. I exit out of the app the moment it starts loading. In less than 24 hours, I'll know the truth anyway. When the sun rises, my eyes finally close.

[sound of the diner]

At eleven in the morning Guy and I meet at a diner in Laconia. Between talking about hockey and how much he hated seeing his cousin, Angela again, he hands me a stack of bills for the check. There's a post-it on the bottom from Greg, telling me what he's planning to do.

I take it with me to the men's room, read it, and tear it up before flushing it.

Back at the farm, we check the security system, Guy turns on the audio and the cousins run through the field, singing some song in French. They come in crystal clear as they pass each of the hidden cameras. We're going to be ready to hear and see anybody trying to get onto the property.

The cousins and I drink a few beers with each other behind the Cyclops. Nobody but Guy, Randy and me know how much money is in that room. Secrets on secrets on more fucking secrets. As the sun goes down, I feed the goats one last time. Big seems to ignore me when I first walk into the pen. I get his attention with a handful of corn.

[narrate]

Joanna's words still sting. If she's telling the truth, his father, Robert, died for nothing.

Most of those animals, they died for nothing.

Whether she's telling the truth or not, I know I made the right call.

I don't dream that night, I don't hear voices.



Friday starts well. I get in a workout, I eat a good breakfast.
I do a few speed drills with my pistol.
Greg's plan is in motion and I know what I have to do.
I take a picture of the least surveilled part of the property and send it to Greg.
I get back a thumbs up emoji.

Joanna

[on the radio]

Guy, John. Meet me in the barn.

JOHN

[narrate]

The new lighting makes the place look like something out of a horror movie. I find its normal look more unsettling. The cows are chewing at their cud lazily while Joanna scrolls through her phone. Guy walks in behind me and slaps me on the back.

GUY

Yeah, cousin?

JOANNA

Before we start, did you keep this a secret?
Nobody knows who we're bringing up here tonight?

GUY

No one.

JOANNA

John, pick him up at this address.
Same protocol as all the others.

JOHN

Understood.

JOANNA

When he gets here, I'll see if he wants to settle in.
He may want to get right to it.
But once he gets onto the property, no one gets in or out.
Understand?



GUY

Oui, Capitaine.

JOANNA

All right. Let's get it started.

JOHN

[narrate]

The ride out to Lake Winnepesaukee is easy. We're off season. Almost no one lives up here year-round anymore. The only people who can afford these homes already own a primary residence somewhere else. It's been that way since I was a kid. It's only gotten worse since.

Driving on the winding road around the lake, I see the moon reflected on the black water.

Tonight's going to be the end, whether Joanna means it to be or not.

The GPS leads me to a gated driveway. I press the call button and wait.

THE CLIENT

Can I help you?

JOHN

I'm your ride.

[security buzz, move of the gate]

[narrate]

The lawn that flanks the cobblestone driveway is gorgeous. A beautiful elm stands in the center of the rotary in front of the house. As far as lake houses go, this one is pretty simple, but its massive porch is lit up like Christmas. The client is seated in a rocking chair. He's in a white suit with a black shirt, a white fancy scarf draped around his neck. His shoulder length hair looks dirty. He's got a bit of a beard.

I pull up, and get out.

THE CLIENT

You found it really quickly.

JOHN

New Hampshire's not that big when you lived here your whole life.

THE CLIENT

What's your name?



JOHN

Normally the driver doesn't talk much, sir.
But my name is John.

THE CLIENT

[amused at the word]
Normally?
[bit if a pause]
All of this is normal to you now?
You one of the family?

JOHN

No sir.
Do you have any bags?

THE CLIENT

Yes, hold on.

[door opens]
[shouting inside]
Oli, can you put my bags in the back for me?
Oh, and whatever you're bringing too.

[to JOHN]

Sorry, I can't really lift what I used to.
Cane gets in the way.

JOHN

[narrate]
The man called Oli is a well dressed murder machine.
He's got four inches in height on me, looks Eastern European.
Gray hair, but he could be anywhere from thirty-five to sixty for all I know.
He's not trying to scare me.
But I can tell, if we fought he'd be able to kill me without hesitation.

JOHN

Sir, I'm only supposed to be bringing you.

THE CLIENT

[trying to charmingly disagree]
I understand. But this man's more than my bodyguard.
He's a brother to me. He's also the only person I trust to give me my medication.



JOHN

Only the client comes to the farm.

THE CLIENT

Given what you do up there, I don't think it'd violate your insurance policy to bring him along.
Besides, if you don't let Oli drive with us, he might get it in his head to follow you.
I'm pretty sure that would call more attention to all of us.

[calmly, Depp-esque]

So please, John. Let him come with me.
I'm sick, Oli knows how to take care of me, and I trust him with my life.
Otherwise... we're going to have to figure something else out.

JOHN

I really can't move on that, sir.

THE CLIENT

Then what do you suggest?

JOHN

[narrate]

Whether I'd chosen Joanna or Greg, neither of them would have planned for this.
All right, think. What do I do here?
I could call Joanna, let her know the situation.
Hold firm and hope Ollie doesn't take my head off to appease his client.
Or, maybe, if I can't take him to the farm, I can bring the farm to him.

Narrator

You can help John make his choice at WicheverPath.com/vote

You'll have until January 25 to make your choice.

Your cast this time was:
Steven as John
Journey LaFond as Joanna
Nicholas Zalowski as Guy
Aaron "Duckie" Lirette as The Client

Second Course, Part Four was written by Steven and Journey.
It was produced by Wichever Path.



Second Course, Part Four: Thirty Pieces

Sound Effects by Witchever Path and Audio Hero.
The Witchever Path Theme Song was written and performed by RYDR.

This following music appears courtesy of Epidemic Sound:

Misty Land by Headlund
Ghost Dungeons and Hidden Output by Ethan Sloan
Final Examination by Jay Varton
Hordes by Jo Wandrini

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