

Guy as the Narrator for the Start

John convinced Guy to take a stand with him, to oust Joanna as the head of the family. This after an intimate moment in which Joanna reiterated her wish to end their practice of sin eating. Did John not believe her? Was he taking a stand because of the living darkness he saw creeping out of Greg's mouth? Or was it because he feared what was inside himself?

Heading out to the back acreage of the farm, he visited the family plot. But he didn't stop to pay his respects. He went to search the final resting place of the man who had nearly killed him four years ago, and to determine why the knife Mr. O was buried with had been found in the barn. Something, or someone had dug a hole at the site of O's resting place, and when John inspected the scene he was attacked by an old, aggressive squirrel.

Seeking medical attention, John got stitches for his hand, Percocet, and a few hours away from the farm, when who should appear on the television but Friday's client. The one Joanna claimed they could retire on. The one Greg believed shouldn't be served in the same way as Joanna intended. Devouring his pain medication, John headed back to work.

Back at the farm, Joanna and John had a drug-fueled argument where she claimed that the sin eating she led for their rich, evil patrons was in-fact, all a con. That no one she'd ever professed to help had actually received absolution. Her game was blackmail and a guarantee that these clients would be damned. When John pressed her on the things he'd seen, about the Dark, she acted like he was high. And he was, but something about her story didn't add up.

Over the next two days, he furthered Greg's plot. And when the night came, John's task was the same one that he had at the beginning, four years ago. Go pick up the client and bring him back. Greg was on his way to the farm, and Joanna was preparing for the client, while John found that the famous actor was ready to go, but not without bringing his bodyguard.

With this sudden turn throwing everyone's plans to the wind, John needed to think fast, and he needed your help to do it.
You chose for him to get creative.

Witchever Path presents Second Course Part Five: Bring the Mountain

[Sound of wine pouring]

The Client

[calm]

All right, John. Drink this and then run it by me again:
What's the new plan?

JOHN

[calmly]

Thanks.

[take sip]

The farm has a strict security procedure. Nobody's able to get in to see what you were doing,
but if they see Oli, the deal would be off.

But we... we could do it here.

Thing is, the way it's done, if you think anyone is watching this house, there's going to be things
they'll see that would raise eyebrows.

The Client

[amused]

In Copenhagen, I went to a party where the host was later suspected of being a cannibal.
I spent five years battling the messiest public divorce imaginable.

I don't have time anymore, John.

I'll be dead.

Let my estate handle bad press.

JOHN

[narrate]

He looks sincerely interested, and nonthreatening.

We're seated across from each other at this antique dining room table. I know it because it's
solid wood, not some particle board bullshit posing as the genuine article. Oli refills the client's
glass and then mine. He's watching me, being careful not to make it obvious.

I can feel my holster against my ribcage.

[phone vibrates]

The Client

[patiently]

Do you need to get that?

JOHN

[apologetically]

Yes, would you excuse me?

The Client

[hospitable]

Oh, sure. You can take it in the drawing room down the hall. We'll wait.

JOHN

[narrate]

I get up, nod at Oli and the client and head into the hall trying to navigate past a jagged sculpture made of stained glass and steel. I've no idea what a drawing room is, but I find the living room and answer.

JOANNA

Hi John, did you arrive?

JOHN

Yes.

JOANNA

Just to check, do you think you were followed? Anything unusual about the drive up?

JOHN

No, and no.

JOANNA

Your connection is really clear. Are you out of your car?

JOHN

Yes.

JOANNA

Are you with the client right now?

JOHN

Yes.

JOANNA

Can they hear you?

JOHN

Yes.

JOANNA

Do you think you need me to send anyone down to you?

JOHN

No.

Joanna

I don't like the delay, but I'm counting on you. Call me when you're halfway here.

JOHN

[narrate]

I make my way back past the stained-glass monstrosity, my jacket snagging on an edge of it. I pull it off gently, and find the client's sitting in front of an empty wine glass.

Before sitting down, I take in the beauty of that antique table.

Deep walnut finish, the knot patterns in the surface looking like faces and patterns.

[to the client]

It's the farm's dispatch, looking for an ETA.

I'll call them back when we've settled the details. If we're going to go off-script, sir, I want to have it go smoothly. Especially if you aren't going to budge on bringing your -

The Client

[cutting off to politely correct]

Oli

JOHN

[pivoting]

Right. If Oli, you know, what, hold on. Oli, you want to sit down with us and hash it out? I don't like talking about you like you're an appliance.

OLI

[grunts]

The Client

[pleasantly surprised]

I don't think I've seen anybody do that since I got to Hollywood thirty [fake cough through number] years ago. Wow.

JOHN

How's that?

The Client

I told you he was like family. And you treated him as such just now.
That's just not something you see.

JOHN

[disarmed a bit]

Okay, well. How much does Oli know about you?

The Client

He's been there for me through every betrayal, my worst marriage.
A winery of mistakes, fights, hospital visits.
He's actually my trusted friend.
I pay him, because...
[laughs]
I'm sorry, that's not what you're asking.
He knows me better than my own mother would.

OLI

I've kept him out of stories he shouldn't be in.

The Client

Oli.

JOHN

[not wanting to back down]
Your client reached out to us, Oli.
Sir,

The Client

Please, call me _____.

JOHN

Okay _____, I'm not used to being this informal with our work.
But when people reach out to us, they're getting ready to.

[narrate]

Oh shit. I'm out of my depth. What do these people know before they sit at the table and bleed?

[to Client]

Tell us anything. There's shit you've done, and stories *you* are in, because you're the person who did them. Your choices brought you to us.
But, how did you find us?

The Client

In 1999, I drank mescaline tea with Shooter Johnson after sneaking into the Mesa Verde National Park to stay the night in the Pueblo Indians' cliff palace. It was the type of shit we would do in those times, before we knew it was sort of obscene to do.
But there was a spirit there that Shooter had written about in one of his novels. One that he said I needed to meet.

You know who he is, right?

JOHN

No. Not even a bit.

THE CLIENT

[laughs at that honesty]

Good, because it doesn't matter, except that he was my friend.
Anyway, the smell of that place, in the dark ruins of a culture we wiped out... it was almost like... ozone?

Like the fabric of the world had split.

[pauses]

Or we were high.

[little laugh]

But we start a small fire, drink our tea, and that's when he tells me he's got Parkinson's. That it's advancing, and he's going to be checking out soon.

And in the firelight, the dark grooves of the scars and wrinkles on his face were so defined that the blackness of the night seemed to cling to him. He told me, "there's a darkness in some of us that isn't native to our humanity. A hungry, greedy shadow. And if you're not careful, you feed it. You can pass it on like syphilis or worse."

"We came here, because it's one of the places in the world where that shadow was at its weakest." He's propped up against this stone wall that had outlived the generations of people who had built it, and he asked if I remembered a controversy of his from the 80s. An accusation about a drunken assault he allegedly carried out in his home.

I didn't. But he told me it went away with the help of old friends and money.

And the shadow behind him grew and swirled, and he just said "but it really didn't."

Because it was true. All of the good he'd done, the causes he supported, the people he'd championed, he had done all of that sincerely. And then he had violated this code of his cavalierly one night, blaming it on alcohol and a prescription pill addiction.

But he said he knew what it was, really. It was the years of things he didn't address, the years of feeding that void in him. It left the space for him to do something that he may have never done before, and never did since. He did what he could to compensate his victim, to figure out how to atone... but the hole, the hole inside him, how do you fix that?

How do you fill it and repair your soul? The darkness, he told me, never makes you do anything. It just helps cloud your perception and empathy. And then when you do something, something that brings it what it needs... but really, you did it. And when you die, you're held to rot into nothing by that foreign invader. Unable to pass on to any judgment or reincarnation.

I didn't get it, I thought it was the drugs. But then he told me, he found a way to bleed that foreign dark out. It was a family somewhere in the Northeast who could eat the dark out of you. But to do it, you needed to tell them all the evil you did.

And that he had done it. A man had come to him, eaten his evil and shadow, but only after he'd told the man everything. He had been delivered from rotting in his shell. But it wasn't enough for him. He needed to repair, to set the record straight.

To atone publicly and own the shit he did.

And it was more than the breaking point, it was each bit of evil that happened along the way.

So he wrote a manuscript that he wanted released on the day of his funeral. It was meant to right wrongs and to warn others. He wanted me to take it and get it published.

I promised him I would. And as I said that, the shadow behind him shook its head.

The next morning, I woke up to find Shooter was gone, leaving behind his sleeping bag, a baggy of mushrooms, and his military surplus backpack. I wandered the ruins, looking for him, and by the edge I saw some disturbed stones. I knew then where I'd find him.

I opened the backpack and found his manuscript. With it was the way to contact the farm with a hand-written note from Shooter "you're gonna need it, son."

JOHN

He jumped.

The Client

He did. He didn't want to die in bed. His prognosis was grim, his doctors had told him they never saw it advance so quickly. So he made up his mind, he'd spend one night with his young friend, get a promise, and then leave the world.

JOHN

What about the book?

The Client

I burned it.

JOHN

[narrate]

He lights a cigarette. The first inhale brings a small cough he tries to stifle.
His eyes well up.

[to the Client]

After you promised to publish it?

The Client

He- Shooter's life, the good he actually did. The way he saw every misstep, every fall from grace as a fucking indictment or counterbalance to that stuff. He never saw his own goodness, his worth. But he was a loving, good soul. The way he remembered things, the way he just turned his laser focus of indignation inward, it wasn't ... it would have killed his wife Mitzie, it would have destroyed his kids. And his legacy- people he inspired to fight the good fight. It wouldn't have come to pass.

So I burned his only copy. I made secret efforts to work to repair the damages he did, and to leave clues that it was him doing that. But I couldn't... I couldn't damn my friend, even though he was ready to do it himself, in some vain attempt to get people to acknowledge their own toxicity. To take ownership of what they do. People wouldn't get it, I told myself.

And something dark in me stirred with that. In protecting his legacy, I betrayed him. Tainted it.

[takes a drag, blows it out]

And then my own corruption continued.

Which leads me here... terminal and penitent, but certain Shooter had it right to begin with. Oli's not just my right hand. Here's here to make sure what happens to me... what I admit to, doesn't get burned. Because I betrayed my friend to "save my memories."
And it led me to shroud my own bullshit and garbage to protect my own skin.

There's no atheist in the bunker.

JOHN

Foxhole. There's no atheist in a foxhole.

The Client

Is that the expression? Shit. Oli, you never corrected me?

JOHN

[narrate]

Oli just shrugs.

The Client gestures at my glass with his burning cigarette.

He wants me to drink. I look over his shoulder, out the large picture window. I can see the moon in the sky, the stars... but little else.

I look back at him and I take a sip.

JOHN

[to the client]

The Darkness your friend told you about.

Do you think he meant it as a real thing?

The Client

Years of booze and distractions had me thinking that it was just the poetic license of a renegade writer from the counterculture who was coming to terms with the rot of American capitalism.

Until I saw it myself.

But then it was too late.

And now I'm inoperable, having seizures occasionally. Last week, I couldn't walk.

And one night, staring up at the ceiling... my pain meds wore off, the pot was out of reach, and I looked at my reflection, and my eyes were... wrong.

JOHN

Your reflection, you were looking... oh. Mirrored ceiling.

The Client

It was my late first wife's idea. I... never got rid of it.

JOHN

[narrate]

My phone vibrates.

It's Greg. I apologize and get back to the living room.

GREG

[serious]

Are you all right?

JOHN

Yeah, I'm all right.

I'm not back yet.

GREG

[concerned]

We're dropping Angela at the backlot now.
Are you on your way?

JOHN

Loading him up now.

GREG

[supportive]

What's the hold up?
Anything you need help with?

JOHN

The Client doesn't want to leave his assistant behind.
I can manage this, let me think on my feet.
Greg?

GREG

Yeah, bud?

JOHN

She's... I think she's sincere.
She wants to quit, dude.

GREG

I hope you're right. Once we get Angela out and into the woods, I'm headed to the driveway.
I'll let her see me coming.
And if it all works out, I'll give the client his money back and send him on his way.

JOHN

What?

GREG

I don't think a celebrity needs us. If anything, I think that he's probably like everyone she finds.
We can't have her feed the Dark on the property the way she has.

JOHN

She says that none of that is true. She doesn't feed anything.
That we were hallucinating that night, drugged.

GREG

If she'll lie to you about that, John. What makes you think she's really going to stop?
Take your time. We'll probably have it all sorted out before you get back.

JOHN

Wait, what. What does that mean?

GREG

[realizing John's fear]

Nobody's getting hurt. We just have to take care of the situation before the client gets here.
Stick to the plan.

JOHN

Is it in me? What's in you?

GREG

[pause]

You know that it is.

JOHN

[not comforted]

Okay.

JOHN

[narrate]

We say our goodbyes. I look down at the living room carpet and I notice something strange.
There are six black, shiny stains, on the carpet, slightly raised off its shag. It's wax. And by their
spacing, I see it's in the shape of a circle.

"This stupid little circle."

[to O]

Shut up.

[narrate]

I touch my bandage and take a breath. I feel chills and my stomach is upset.
Back in the car, O had mentioned a circle like that. His story about something pulling that girl
into the closet. I look around the living room for signs of any security cameras.
The dark is real. The family is about to fight. And the man in the other room has secrets.

I carefully walk back into the hallway, paranoid that someone will jump out of a hidden spot and start fighting with me. I come back into the well-lit dining area and Oli is handing the client his pills.

The Client

[curious]

I don't mean to pry, but is everything settled?

You said we'd be doing things a bit differently because you wouldn't bring me to the farm alone.
How's that going to work?

JOHN

[narrate]

I take a sip of wine to steady my nerves.

[to Client]

You're going to need ... to need.

Oh fuck...

Waitamminute. Did you-?

The Client

What? Drugged you?

Yeah, I'm sorry.

I'm actually really sorry.

Oli. Help our friend.

JOHN

[standing up]

Like hell, stay away from me.

[violent struggle, a punch... JOHN coughing and falling to the floor]

The Client

I was with you, until you slipped up, John.

It was Shooter's name that made me decide to drug you.

[getting angry]

You don't know who he is? *Really?*

We all know who Shooter is.

I played him in '96.

It's how a whole generation learned about his work.

We became inseparable for years.

You really expect me to believe you don't know who he is? You should.

He came to you people for help.

For decades, I would think about that night, the shit he confessed to in that book.

I hoped he understood I burnt that thing to protect him.

I would forget about it all for months at a time, only for it to hit me like a gunshot every other year then I'd panic that it would be the year you'd all come out and release everything he said... and what it would mean to his wife and kids... to the world.

Then in 2019, I told my rotten manipulator of an ex about that night on the mesa. Do you know what she did? She threatened to expose it. To talk to the press. She showed me she was recording on her phone, so I grabbed it and smashed the thing.

Then I tore our fucking house apart, found every device that could record and I destroyed them.

I had our clouds wiped, I made *sure* nothing would exist of what I said about Shooter to her. About what I did. She could do whatever she wanted to me. I deserve most of it, I'm not going to lie. You don't get to live to my age in this world without the scars to prove it. And she's no prize, but I can't have my friends threatened. When she left, I drank and went through old boxes and photos of Shooter and me and found the note with your address.

And I remembered... there was a place that knew everything I tried to hide about him.

There were people who had heard what he had done. His failings. His black mark. And they were just sitting on this knowledge. And about four bottles of Pinot in, I called someone.

JOHN

Who?

The Client

Someone you call on when you're in our line of work and you know you have a problem that money and lawyers can't fix. I was disgusted that I did it. His voice alone frightened me. But I didn't need a hero. I needed him.

I sent him to your farm to get whatever you had on Shooter.

And to get rid of it.

But he never came back.

Which was another sign something wasn't right here.

JOHN

[narrate]

I try to get up from the floor, but Oli kicks my ribs.

One breaks like it's made of balsa wood.

I see stars.

[panting, coughing]

Wait. Wait.
You sent... O.

The Client

[calm]

Oli, pick him up and get him back in his chair.
John, don't fight back.
Even if you weren't under the effect of a cocktail of sedatives,
Oli's nobody I'd want to mix it up with.

J\

HN

[narrate]

I struggle, but Oli lifts me and tosses me back in the chair.

[to client]

The Client

I take it you know what I'm talking about now, don't you?
Yes, I sent that man to your farm.

JOHN

[panting]

I saw the circle in there.
What were ... did you do that?

The Client

What? Oh yeah, the circle.
Shooter had notes. Weird books.
He willed them all to me.
That circle was supposed to call him back from the void.
To communicate with me.
It didn't work, though.

JOHN

You sent that fucking killer after us.

The Client

[calm]

I did. And it was premature, maybe, and wrong.
But the guy didn't come back.
He just vanished. Guys like that, they don't vanish.
Not unless you call another guy to make sure that happens.
I waited to see if there'd be any retaliation.
For Shooter's family to get targeted, or for a blackmail letter to come.
It never came.

I'm dying, and there's something about your business that just doesn't add up.
So I'm going to ask you something. If you lie, Oli will hurt you.

Is what you all do real?

JOHN

I was the driver.

[punch, yell and wince]

DAMN IT.

I'm telling the truth!

It's... real.

The dark is real.

The sin eating is real.

The Client

Where's O?

JOHN

Dead. He's been dead for years.

The Client

Oh.

JOHN

He didn't finish his confession. He pretended to go through all of it to see what my boss did. If
you don't finish, if you leave things out... the Dark will consume you...
But he was there to do... what you ordered him to do.
He didn't know what was going to happen next.
Neither did I.

[narrate]

Oli's massive hand squeezes the back of my neck as he reaches into my coat, pulls my gun out and places it on the table.

[to the client]

Are you even really fucking dying?!

The Client

[firmly]

Probably by the end of the week for all I know.

I hate that it's come to this, John, but you gotta understand how much I love Shooter. Still. He was like a brother. But there's a part of me that needs to know what kind of people you are.

So the sins are eaten? How?

JOHN

[narrate]

I need three things.

The Client

I need to know you're able to do what you say.

JOHN

I'll prove it all.

Get me bread on a plate. Get me a knife. Let me make a call.

[narrate]

I feel Oli's fingers find my carotid artery as he squeezes. There are spots in my eyes.

The client sighs.

The Client

Let him go.

Get the bread, knife and plate.

OLI

Sir?

The Client

This is going to work, Oli, or you're cleaning up a mess.

Either way, it's okay.

[to John]

What's scary here, John, is that I believe you. I believe you all can do this.
You say O's dead. That all of this is real.
Had you not lied about Shooter, before, I'd have just gone along with you.

JOHN

I was nineteen and living in Nashua when your friend came up here, _____.
I hadn't even met the family I work for until five years ago.
And as for your friend. I only like your Bandits of Evermoon movies, dude.
I never watched your art haus shit.

The Client

[laughs]

That stings, but now I get where I went wrong tonight. Where I always go wrong. I love hard,
John. Too hard. And that love makes me righteous and dangerous. I'm sorry.

So let's try this again. Hi, I'm _____.

I believe you can give me a chance to escape the things that have plagued me most of my life
and a chance to atone for things which I don't think I could be forgiven for by most people.

Do it, I'll double what I paid up front.

JOHN

And if we help you, what stops Oli from killing us?

The Client

I guess we both have to trust in the process.

JOHN

[narrate]

I grab my phone out of my pocket.

The Client

Who are you calling?

JOHN

I need to check in. Or it won't matter what you two do to me.

[narrate]

I call and when the phone picks up I speak into the receiver:

He's not going to come up, so I'm going to make this a house call.

Understood.

No.

Yes.

Wine, mostly.

Understood.

Yes.

Goodbye.

Oli walks into the room with a serving tray. There's a loaf of Italian bread on a white porcelain plate, bought from the Market Basket I passed when I came to town. A bread knife lay next to the plate, its dull serrated edges looking too dangerous for this job.

But I have one of my own...

The client's face has returned to that charming, engaged calm he had at the beginning.

[to the client]

What you're going to tell me tonight will stay between us three, but it comes at a price.

The cost is blood and honesty.

Can you afford that?

The Client

I can.

JOHN

[narrate]

I point to my pocket and wait for Oli to nod.

I take out O's trench knife and look at the client.

My vision's blurry. I'm gripping the knife harder than I've held anything before to make sure I don't drop it.

Give me your hand.

We have a long night ahead.

NARRATOR

Character is destiny. And here's what you got to decide.
Does John think this guy is worthy of redemption or not?
And even with that decision, who did he decide to call that last time?

You can go and do it now at witcheverpath.com/vote
You have a week to decide.

The Second Course is nearly over.

It was written by Steven and Journee, and produced by Witchever Path.

Your actors were:

Nicholas Zalowski as Guy
Steven LaFond as John
Aaron Lirette as The Client
Journee LaFond as Joanna
Ragnar Arneson as Greg

The Witchever Path Theme Song is by RYDR
Foley by Audio Hero and Witchever Path

Additional music is licensed through EpidemicSound.com. Those tracks are:

MistyLand by Headlund
No Sleep for Old Bones by These Old Bones
Dew by De Sein
Spider Room by Ethan Sloan
Arbitrary Treatment and Superliminal Motion by Prozody
No Redemption by Christoffer Moe Ditlevson
The Vanished by John Barzetti

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Second Course, Part Five: Bring the Mountain

This current season has been growing in listeners and we are glad you're here. Let's make the finale of Second Course a big one. Vote now, and then sleep with a clear consequence. Choose the Path.