



RAGNAR (GREG)

The Client refused to leave his bodyguard, Oli, behind. Realizing that the entire night had been thrown into chaos, John had to think fast. Stalling for time, he talked to both Joanna and Greg on the phone. He let them know he'd be later than he expected.

He was hoping to learn more about the Client. To see what type of man this dying actor was. So John asked the Client how he learned about the farm. Holding John's attention, the man spun a story of his old friend, the writer Shooter Johnson.

Shooter had taken him on a drug-fueled trip to an abandoned village where he confessed to dark crimes, and the method he used to save his soul.

Shooter detailed his trip to the farm, what he had done, and asked the Client to publish Shooter's memoir after he died.

Instead, wanting to protect his friend's legacy, the Client burned it.

After another call, John returned to hear the rest of the client's story only to find that he'd been drugged. The Client had found it suspect that John didn't know who Shooter was. He had John beaten by his bodyguard while he confessed that in order to protect Shooter's legacy further, he was the one who had sent Mr. O to the farm. O's mission had been to find the dirt on Shooter, and kill whoever was planning to use it.

That didn't happen. And now, clinging to life, the Client had a change of heart. He wanted to give the ritual a try. When John told the Client he hadn't even known the farm existed until five years prior, the actor seemed embarrassed and contrite. He asked to start again.

So John volunteered to do the ritual for him.

But first he made one final call.

The choice set before the audience was this. Did John believe that the Client deserves the real ritual as Greg performed it? And who did he call?

That's what we'll find out together.

Witchever Path Presents

Second Course, Part Six

Dinner is Served (*darker voice*)



[Sound of the plate served to the CLIENT]

JOHN

[to the Client]

Usually, we'd help you with the first cut, _____.
But the drugs and Oli's hands are making it hard for me to move right.

THE CLIENT

The cocktail will wear off in about six hours, John.
Should we wait?

JOHN

If it's all the same to you, sir.
I don't want to fucking stay here any longer than I have to.

THE CLIENT

John, I can't apologize enough.
If you want to go, I suppose we can't stop you.

JOHN

Don't.

THE CLIENT

I'm not going to.

[John spits]

JOHN

So that's my blood I just spat onto your tablecloth.
I'm bleeding because big hands here beat me.
Because you were trying to find out a secret.
So whatever you want to say about what just happened, save it.
The way the farm helps people is based on blood and truth.
So my truth is this: I'm helping you because it's what needs to happen.
I don't want to be friends.
Oli's more of a threat to your secrets than me.

OLI

Fuck you.



THE CLIENT

Oli, calm down. He's right to be angry.
All right, John.
I'm ready to do this.

JOHN

[pushed knife on the table]
Take this.
Either of you can use it, but you need to make a decent cut.
You're going to have to bleed. Your blood binds the sins to the bread. Then it's eaten.

But listen to me carefully, _____.
If you leave anything out, that dark shadow behind Shooter? That darkness in your eyes?
It's going to do whatever it can to come for whatever is left inside you.
It's going to get it, and you with it.

THE CLIENT

[agreeing]
Okay, I'll do it.
Oli, give me the knife.

JOHN

[narrate]
Oli comes over to my side of the table again, and grabs the knife.
He pauses for a full three seconds next to me, his hand wrapped around the hilt.
I'm ready to at least take one swing, even if it fails.
But he walks back to the Client.
He hands _____ the knife.
_____ holds it by the end of the hilt, with it pointing down toward the plate and bread.
He puts his chin on the back of his hand and looks thoughtful.

THE CLIENT

So, it's going to need enough blood to coat it, but not enough to kill me.
[to Oli]
Stay back, Oli. It's not the first time I've done this.

JOHN

[narrate]
He's not lying. He rolls up one of his sleeves and I see a scar across one of his faded tattoos.
He corrects his grip on the knife. There's a tremor in his hand for a minute.



OLI
Sir.

THE CLIENT
[angry]
I fucking got it, Oli.
I can *do it*.
Sorry. Sorry friend, just let me try.

[THE CLIENT takes a breath and will have some PAINED SOUNDS]

JOHN
[narrate]
He takes a breath and steadies his hand and the knife digs a parallel line next to his old scar. O's knife has been rusted and marked from its time in the Earth, but the way it opens up the Client's skin tells me its sharper than it has any right to be.

I look at the blood, and my heartbeat begins to fill my ears. What's inside me wakes up.

[to the client]
Now. Let's start.
Time to tell me every bad thing, _____.

THE CLIENT
What if I've forgotten something?

JOHN
You didn't.
Start.

THE CLIENT
[sigh, slightly in pain]
Okay, I'm going to say them as they come to me.
I called in favors from the press and gave them dirt on my ex that I didn't want to say in our divorce first, because it would be hearsay. I protected my image by pre-emptively leaking surveillance videos and secret recordings. By being in the press, they were then admissible in court. She did all the shitty things. All of them. The fights, the violence.
... But, I edited out my parts. I found ways to erase or get my own shit off those master tapes. I never hit her, But I ... I made it seem like I would.
I can be convincing.
And I terrified her. I even smashed through the house with a tomahawk one night. I scared her so terribly. And it was ... because I thought she had slept with someone that ... I know now she didn't.



I broke my foot trying to break down a door she locked between us.
And I really *would* never have physically hurt her, even when she attacked or punched me.
But to get her to stop, I made it seem like I would.
Or that I'd let... other people who worked for me do it.

Even talking about it, I want to tell you WHY I did it, but

JOHN

You need to tell me what you did that was wrong.
You know what you're doing.
Avoid justification. Just confess.

[narrate]

He keeps talking about this divorce.
And I remember my ex. And my temper.
And the things a larger guy can do that are scary.
And the assault I committed on another man in a jealous rage that...
ensured she'd never look at me the same way again.
I feel the cold turn of my guts warm a bit out of sympathy for him.
Until.

THE CLIENT

I defended Kristian Dahmer against allegations of things worse than Shooter ever did, even
though I stopped talking to him after my initial help.
I didn't want to believe that I knew another man who had done anything so fucking vile, but I
became a terror in my marriage, John. Not three years later.
I was still a bad boy, and I refused to believe that the mystique and controversy me and my
contemporaries cultivated was anything more than a cool image.
Kristian, really, was a cool cat. I thought.
But ... when the video hit.
Fuck. Man.
Why did I cover for him?
I think I know why. Because I refused to believe someone who was that talented would be that
evil. Because if he was... then I was, too.

JOHN

What defense did you give?
I didn't see that.

THE CLIENT

I paid for someone to go talk to her lawyers.
And then... when I was told I was backing the wrong horse, I ... stepped away.



JOHN

You abetted a monster.

THE CLIENT

I met my wife around that time.
I think that ... I think it led to my drug and alcohol use.
But it ... it wasn't the worst I've done.
I was seventeen... It was after my first movie.
There was a party...

JOHN

[narrate]

I can feel the Dark in me as he tells it... the worst thing he's ever done.
The details are excruciatingly vivid. The set-up, the harm he caused, how he made sure no one else ever found out. How he overdosed in an attempt to commit suicide.
The smell of his blood, the echo of his sin, the one he hid from everyone. Shooter, his employees, everyone... it's hanging in the air.
I look at the clock on the wall. He's been talking for over thirty minutes.
They'll be here soon. I know it.
He coughs and some of his blood from his wound hits my face.
And something in me hisses. The Dark within me is hungry.

THE CLIENT

[surprised]

Oh John, I'm sorry about that.
Oli, can you bandage me up?

[phone vibrates]

JOHN

[narrate]

I don't need to look at my phone.
They're here.
Oli and the Client are looking at me, expectantly.

[to the Client]

It's not the first time blood's hit me in the face on your account.

JOHN

Oli, pick up the plate. Let's head to the backyard and the lake.
We need to finish out there. The offer needs to be accepted.



THE CLIENT

I thought you were the one who I'm offering it to.

JOHN

This has to be done right, or it isn't going to work at all.
So, big man, _____ is drunk and if he drops it, this shit's for nothing.
I can't do it.
You beat the fuck out of me, and I don't like you.
Guess you're gonna carry the plate.

[sound of the slider]

[narrate]

The night air is cold on my skin.
I think about making a break for it, around the house, but Oli'll catch me before my rescuers can stop him. So I stumble out through the dead leaves toward the shore of the lake.
I can smell someone's wood stove going.
The smoke on the breeze stirs the dark smoke in my gut and my vision comes into sharp focus. I become sober. Mixed with the smell of smoke is the dripping contents of the plate.
I want it ... now. But self-control is the only thing I have right now.
I turn and face the client when we get to the water. Both he and Oli look disturbed.

THE CLIENT

Your eyes.

JOHN

Place the plate down on the sand.

THE CLIENT

And then?

JOHN

The Dark sends who he wants to eat it.

[narrate]

We stand there, in the autumn chill in silence for three minutes.
The calvary is late.
The smell- the transgression and coppery accents of his blood.
I lick my lips.
Oli's fear has diminished. He looks at me with a nervous disgust.



The Client

[slightly skeptical]

John... I'm sorry but how much longer are we to wait?
I expected

[cut off by the sudden deathly quiet of no power]

JOHN

Just like that, the power is out. The lights of the house and that of the neighbors are all off.
Oli's reaching into his coat already.

THE CLIENT

[to me]

What did you do?

JOHN

You wanted absolution, _____.
This is the road to it.

THE CLIENT

Oli, call the teams next door. Tell them to be ready.

[hear of mumbling walkie talkies]

JOHN

Teams?

THE CLIENT

I'm famous, John. I have enemies. Paparazzi, stalkers. The ex.
I needed privacy, so I rented most of the houses on this road.
I'll be dead, the money won't come with me.
But anything's

OLI

_____. There's someone at the gate.
Two of them. On horses.

THE CLIENT

[to John]

Who is that?



JOHN

[narrate]

I try to answer, but I'm not finding the words.
Gone are the drugs, but my attention is on the plate.

O

It's right there, John.
All the proof. Eat it.
What's the worst that happens?
You get a mouthful of icky stuff and you know Joanna's a liar?

The Client

John?

[banging on the gate]

JOHN

Let 'em in or this is over.

THE CLIENT

Oli, do as he says.

OLI

And leave him with you?
Fuck that...

THE CLIENT

I mean, get someone to let them in, man.
Nobody's making any more mistakes.
John, what did you mean about blood hitting your lips on my account?

JOHN

[narrate]

The radio chatter happens.
The Dark in me seems to coil and spin. This is how the clients must feel at the barn.
The radios, the knowledge that they're surrounded.
I think about the bleeding face of Mr. O as we wrestled in the barn.
His blood dropping onto my face as we struggled.



O

What will he taste like?
What did he leave out?
Don't leave it to someone else, John.
You can do it.

JOHN

[narrate]

I crouch over the plate, and I turn it clockwise, watching the moonlight glisten.

[to the client]

I was there the night O attacked.
He stabbed me, we fought.
It's been with me every day.

[narrate]

I see Oli's gun in his hand, he's watching me.
From around the house comes two armed men, leading in who I called.
Joanna... and... Greg.
The shadow in me slaps about my ribcage with the rhythm of my heart.
They're not on horseback, but Joanna's holding a rope.
And behind her... is Big. I recognize his curved horns and gray coat.
Greg gives a sly nod. In the moonlight, I'm sure even Oli thinks its to me. But it's not.
His eyes are on the lake behind me.
Ah. Okay.
They're ready for blood.

Joanna

_____. Why's John bleeding?

The Client

I didn't trust him. Who are you?

JOANNA

I'm Joanna, who you were supposed to meet.
This is my brother, Greg. Greg I'm sure you know _____.

Greg

Yeah, saw some of your movies before.
[polite and calm]
John.



The Client

So, what's with the goat?

GREG

My sister brought him to eat your sins.

Joanna

And my brother wants you to take your money back.
And we all walk away from this.

The Client

The goat eats the sins, huh?
Is that how it works?

JOHN

[narrates]

And then he turns to me, his glassy drunk eyes are easier to read than a billboard.
Shooter told him how it's really done.
He smells a rat.
And what's more... I now know a truth. He has not said all he had to say.
His lips curl in anger and as he starts to speak, I stand up with the plate.

JOHN

[tough and firm]

No. This is being done the way it needs to go.
I needed you all here to witness what's going to happen.
_____ has confessed, and in front of the family, I accept his offerings.
_____, do you swear that all of your sins are here for me to consume?

JOANNA

What?!

GREG

John, don't!

The Client

What are you playing at, John?

JOHN

Answer the question, now.

The CLIENT

Of course. You told me what to do, I did it.



JOHN

All right. I accept. I accept every sin. And I'm going to eat them.

[narrate]

With the first bite, I see through the Client's eyes. His rage, and his unthinking violence as he trashes his home. The fear on his wife's face, the woman he married because her own excess and volatility matched the Sid and Nancy aesthetic he romanticized, but with the sheen of Hollywood prettying them up.

And I see the lies, the goading, the ridiculous plotting to set up the perfect shot to have in reserve should the press ever need to see what "really" happened in the house.

I feel the darkness from within him merge with mine, and I know he's a liar.

With each bite, I see the secretive dosing of women and friends.

I see the manipulations and coverups and the tears and self-delusions.

I see the face of O, smiling and fearsome as he is paid to come to our farm.

And I then lose control. I slam fistfuls of bread into my mouth while Greg and Joanna look at me in horror. And as I consume every trespass, I lose more of myself to the hunger, because I know... I know it's incomplete. And I see Big, staring at me with his fucking muppet eyes, and I hope he knows that I'm not doing this entirely for my friends, but because I can't bear to watch him die for this asshole.

My blood-soaked fingers slide off the empty plate in disbelief. I find some scraps on the ground and I snatch them up. The dirt caked pieces scratch at my gums.

And the Dark let me know... there's more.

And I sniff at the air.

My body isn't mine. I want to tell you I'm horrified as I stand, but I'm not. The Dark crawls up my spine and into my skull. I don't feel pain. Oli gets in front of the client. He puts two into my side, but I don't drop. I'm on him and before the other guards have a chance to react, two quick zips come from behind me, followed by the sound of the rifles. The men fall and Joanna and Greg run for cover.

I feel the impact of Oli's pistol on my face, and my nose gives way, but it's only as annoying as finding mustard on my jacket. My right hand finds Oli's eye socket, and out comes one of those Nordic eyes. His scream is cinematic in its drama, but barely registers as I bite into his neck, and let my teeth meet around his windpipe. He goes down.

Greg and Joanna have taken cover behind a large brick oven and are returning fire on security attempting to come around the fence.



Big runs to the back porch, hiding from the chaos.
The client, though, is trying to get away.
I see him already entering the house.
No.

[sound of running]
[door opens]

_____. I yell. I am going to get him. The house is dark, and I can hear him stumbling down the hallway, toward the dining room. I start to pass the sculpture of glass and steel when the Client begins shooting. The bullets hit the sculpture and shards of glass go flying into the side of my face. I race into the room and find him holding my gun.
I slap it out of his hands and throw him into the wall.

THE CLIENT

Please, I'll give you whatever you want!

JOHN

You have already.

[narrate]

His scream is long and excruciating, but with it comes more of his secrets. Things I see that take the place of happy memories from my youth, things that I enjoy. With every breath, I exhale what's made me a man, and I inhale what made him a monster. And then I get it.

Why she doesn't do it Greg's way.

Why Greg doesn't want her clients.

And as his blows against my body slow down and he begins to gag, I stop.

Even as the shadow within reaches for him, I push myself away.

GUY

[yelling out]

Kitchen is clear!

GREG

[PANICKED]

Living Room Clear!

JOANNA

JOHN?!

JOHN

Dining room.



JOHN

[narrate]

The tactical lights from their pistols light up the room as all three of them converge on me.
I hear another two rifle shots from the outside.
Whether the Dark within is angry with me, or the adrenaline has stopped pumping, all of the
pain hits at once. I vomit and collapse.

I'm dragged to my car and put in the back seat.
The emergency sirens are coming from across the water.
We drive past flashing lights, and the fact they're all red brings me relief. Firemen headed to
investigate the power outage.
We're already at the main street before the cops race past us to the Client's rental.

I pass out in the back before we hit the highway.

[radio – Star of the silver screen, found dead in an apparent attack. Authorities are]

GUY

[stage whisper]

Hey, turn that off. John's awake.

[gently and kindly]

Oh, frere. You're awake. Merci, God!

Don't move.

Joanna! Greg!

Get in here.

JOHN

[narrate]

We're in my room. The adhesive of my facial bandage itches.
The solid ache of my sides lets me know that I can't move without it leaping into agony.
Jo's face is hard to read. She's not angry, but if I was hoping for any sign of sympathy and love, it
isn't here. And it shouldn't be.
But Greg's compassion is a comfort, as is Guy's enthusiasm.

GUY

[nurturing]

Stay still. We got you all sewed up, but this ain't a hospital.

JOHN

I get it.

So... Everybody.

I had to do it.



I ... fucked up so much this week.
I'm sorry.

Greg

No, John... I'm sorry. I should have followed your advice and gone up with you the night we met. I didn't believe Jo would ever stop.
I lost sight of my sister, of everybody here.
I should have just talked to her.

JOANNA

We had a murderer sent after us, and how I handled it, I – I should have let everyone in. But I couldn't. I thought we needed someone to steer the course. But the shit just got deeper.
We've been talking while you were out.
We came to an understanding.

GREG

No more blackmail. I'm going to take the business over, but on the road.

GUY

Me and my family are moving back to the farm in a week or two.
Gonna start raising goats and sheep full time.

JOHN

You're good with that?

JOANNA

Yeah, I'm leaving.

JOHN

What?

JOANNA

He paid in cash. He's dead. I don't need to stay here anymore. I said I'd be done.
I'm done.

JOHN

Okay. Y'all shot more than a few people out there.
What's the blowblack?

GUY

Angela and Paul used the ol' rifles. Ain't registered to nobody.
We should be good.



JOHN

[narrate]

I think about my gun.

The security cameras that had to exist in that area that were likely on before the outage.

They all look happy.

[to them]

Have I been out long?

GREG

Just a day, bud. But you're not out of the woods yet.

Rest up. We can talk more when you're ready.

GUY

[brotherly]

He's right. Love ya, bud.

JOHN

[narrate]

The two of them leave. Jo stays behind.

She waits until she no longer hears their footsteps.

JOANNA

I should hate you.

JOHN

You don't?

JOANNA

In the end, you trusted me, why?

JOHN

You're hard to love, Jo.

Whether your Dad treated you badly, or the evil you heard just kept chipping away.

You don't let anyone in. But I saw the real you. And even though I agreed with Greg and Guy.

When it came down to it, when I was with _____, I saw clearly what you were trying to tell me. You couldn't give the rich assholes what they wanted, but you couldn't let anybody else in on it. What I don't understand... is the lie about the Dark.

JOANNA

I didn't know you had seen Greg do it.

And if you really knew what was out there, what we do... what would that have done?



JOHN

I don't agree with what you did, but it doesn't matter. Once I saw what he did, what he was, I knew that this guy was more of the same. And when he told me about O... I knew y'all were next. So I did what I could.

I bet you'd bring the calvary, that we had a better chance attacking than lying in wait. But the way you responded with everyone... I never dreamed it'd go that well.

JOANNA

My family's still family. It sucks it took this.

JOHN

I'm glad for you.

JOANNA

What does it feel like?

JOHN

You mean... inside? I hear the Client. I can see what he did if I think about it.

I can hear O, too. I get it now. What your family did.

What I hate? I lost some things. I don't know what, but I know it's gone.

Greg's probably the same.

JOANNA

If people do it right, Dad said they were quiet inside him.

But –

I don't think that's true.

JOHN

Yeah.

Jo, I'm going to die in this bed if I don't get a real doctor.

JOANNA

We'll get you help.

JOHN

Okay. I loved you, you know.

JOANNA

I loved you, too.



JOHN

[narrate]

At 3AM, I fight through my pain and slide out of the bed. It's hard to sneak through the house, but I do it. I grab my keys and limp outside. I get over to my car and take a look at the Cyclops.

Sitting in the driver seat, I feel stitches rip. I look into the goat pen, hoping to see Big. But they're all inside their little shed, asleep.

I pull out of the driveway. The note I left on the bed will be found, but not in time. I take a series of side roads until I get to the dam north of Rowe's Corner. The Merrimack River is racing by. I spend a few minutes sending the audio of the Client's confession of his misdeeds to the Times, and local papers.

The asshole should have taken my phone after the last call.

Then I get out of my car. My leg is wet and heavy. The gun shots on my side are open and I'm fading. I lied to Joanna. There was nothing past tense about my love.

Except I wasn't brave enough to fight for it until now.

The swirling Darkness in me turns my stomach as I sit on the warm hood of my car and turn my camera onto my face.

"My name is John Collins. This my confession. I killed _____ in self defense after a fight at his house. I was contracted by him to do some weird fucking occult thing.

I have sent audio of his fucked up confessional, ritual, or whatever, to several papers.

He paid me because he thought I was some sort of medium.

But as I'm dying, I just want to say to my friends who gave me a job, tried to keep me fed for years... I'm sorry. I'm sorry that I did all of this, but I can't let a bad man go free. And even though _____ deserved it, I couldn't let any of you be connected to this.

I'm sorry I took your car.

I'm sorry I... I'm sorry. "

The darkness in me thrashes about a bit, but I cast my whole attention to it. Soon, I'll fall into the real dark. And it will come with me, back to where it came from. And the two people who thought they'd escape that fate... won't.

I don't know if I'll be stuck with them or not. I just know that there are no shortcuts to redemption.



NARRATOR

Witchever Path's Second Course has completed.

Thank you for steering this story through the complications, betrayals, and conclusion. Second Course was written by Steven and Journee LaFond and Produced by Witchever Path LLC. The Witchever Path Theme Song is by RYDR.

It starred

Ragnar Arneson as Greg

Journee LaFond as Joanna

Steven LaFond as John

Aaron Duckie Lirette as the Client

Nicholas Zalowski as Guy

The Finale was written by Steven and Journee LaFond and produced by Steven. Foley was by Witchever Path and Audio Hero.

The following music was licensed via Epidemic Sound.
Superliminal Motion and Arbitrary Treatment By Prozody
Rise from the Shadows by Hampus Naeselius
Deathwish Attic by Exeperia
Enter the Realm of Shadows by Christoffer Moe Ditlevson
Grab that Hatchet by John Sumner
A Solitary Man's Soul by Lars Eriksson
I'm Done, Au Revoir - by Humble Hey
And John's theme - Misty Land by Headlund

Playing John again was a blast, and I thank you for giving me the honor of doing it. While his story is over, it may not be over for our family of sin eaters. On the Patreon this week, we're releasing a little epilogue to this story, and cooking up all sorts of new content for you.

For just five dollars a month you can access to all of our great exclusive stories, alternate endings, and other auditory delights never released to the general public. Our higher tiers give you live chats with the creators, behind the scenes info and special things that let you know how much we love you.

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If you can't join, there's plenty of other ways to support us. Review us on your podcast apps, recommend us to your friends, and follow us on social media. Your word of mouth is how we got the following we have, and a sincere connection to the show is preferable than marketing, right?

We have another story in the works that will be coming soon. But did you know we now produce a second show? The Decolonize and Discover podcast features BIPOC creators in scifi,

Second Course, Part Six: Dinner is Served



music, art, burlesque, LARP, and gaming who bring their unique perspectives to their craft, and elevate the experiences of everybody who experiences them. Hosted by Journee and Jes Negrón, the show is a lot of fun. We hope you'll like it.

Until next time, protect trans youth, fight back against bigotry, and Sleep with a Clear Consequence. Choose the Path.