

# Nekropolis

The First Ten Pages

by

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ON BLACK

*The distinctive acoustics of an auditorium-- a cacophony of murmuring voices-- light music plays as the audience settles.*

FLASHBACK - INT. AUDITORIUM - PORTLAND CENTER FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS

The MUSIC FADES as a heavysset man with a warm demeanor approaches center stage. This is MR. SHELBY (50s). He addresses the audience:

MR. SHELBY

I know, I know - another play to sit through-- I know. You must be thinking: "Boy! The theater's more exciting than a Blazers game..."

*(the audience appreciatively laughs)*

Your butts are tired and the meds are wearing off, so I'll try to be brief. Uh... hi! I'm Mark Shelby; I'm over at Hudson's Bay High School.

*(A "woot woot" from some audience members)*

In all honesty, it doesn't get any more exciting than this for me. I've seen some remarkable works today, but it is my privilege this evening to introduce our last play of the Northwest Young Playwrights Scholarship Finals. So let me take a minute and say a few words about this bright, young author and--

*(motions to judges in the front row)*

butter up the committee...

Josh Miller was a superlative student of mine. And as the writer of his recommendation letter, I can personally vouch for the many accomplishments behind him - and foretell the even greater ones to come.

Now... good students are a dime a dozen...

BACKSTAGE - MEANWHILE

Controlled chaos. Actors are warming up-- last minute adjustments to costumes-- crew members on headsets.

MR. SHELBY (O.S.)  
*(through the monitor)*  
 ... but the ones teachers remember  
 most are the ones that bend the  
 rules - that challenge us - and that  
 ultimately become the real teachers.

A cute girl in a summer dress moves through the crowd.  
 This is ZOE DRAKE (19 here).

She searches the backstage area for someone. Heads into--

DRESSING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

--and approaches an actor applying the finishing touches to  
 his makeup. This is DANIEL COLTON (20 here).

ZOE  
 I don't know where he is.

DANIEL  
 You call him?

ZOE  
 Yes! Dan... he's losing it  
 again-- I know it.

DANIEL  
 Ay yi yi.... *(preoccupied)* I  
 don't know. I'm on in like a  
 minute-- sorry.

MR. SHELBY (O.S.)  
 Josh Miller taught me, as  
 you're about to see  
 exemplified, the qualities  
 that make a great leader...

Firstly, the importance of  
 teamwork...

For what good is a leader  
 without the brilliant,  
 faithful collaborators  
 surrounding him?

Frustrated, Zoe leaves the dressing room and out into--

BACKSTAGE - CONTINUOUS

She searches the crowd again,  
 growing increasingly  
 concerned.

She pulls out her phone and  
 tries calling...

MR. SHELBY (O.S.)  
 Compassion... the ability to  
 empathize with the world and  
 see what needs fixing.

Humbleness... knowing that  
 it's not you that is  
 important but rather your  
 actions...

AUDITORIUM - CONTINUOUS

MR. SHELBY  
 ... And courage. Courage to  
 persevere against all obstacles.  
*(beat)*

(MORE)

MR. SHELBY (CONT'D)

Recently, Josh's single parent family has faced devastating medical hardships.

In the front row, CANDICE MILLER (late 40s) watches from a wheelchair in the aisle. She wears a wide-brim hat to conceal the effects of recent chemotherapy.

MR. SHELBY

The financial and emotional stresses have, for the time being, forced Josh to put his education on hold. But - a testament to his courage - he's chosen to face these struggles, pains and uncertainties by representing them as story and characters....

BACKSTAGE - MEANWHILE

The exit door to the alleyway opens. A young man in a blue tuxedo steps in. He moves uncertainly, his body slumped.

The light catches his face: he's handsome; thin; in his eyes a constant introspection... perhaps haunted by what's within.

This is JOSH MILLER (20 here).

MR. SHELBY (O.S.)

... Like the Greek myth of Sisyphus, his protagonist ends each day no closer to a solution than the last.

In a matter of seconds Josh undergoes a transformation: his body straightens; he adjusts his tie; his confidence grows with each step. He becomes a magnetic presence that can inspire.

MR. SHELBY (O.S.)

For death has no solution. The outcome cannot be changed... In the end, we must change ourselves.

Josh walks by Zoe and kisses her. He pats Daniel on the back, reassuringly.

MR. SHELBY (O.S.)

For such a young mind, he's shown a firm grasp of the heart.

The cast and crew gather around him. He assertively nods. He knows they're ready...

MR. SHELBY (O.S.)

This will be the first of many from a promising new talent. Thank you, and enjoy.

Josh stands at the edge of the curtain, listening to the AUDIENCE CLAP and CHEER. There's no turning back now. He takes a deep breath... hoping... believing his play will be good. The house lights drop and we--

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. JOSH'S BEDROOM - AFTERNOON

JOSH lies in bed with an empty stare. He clutches his chest from some unrelenting burden. Too depressed to move as the day passes by behind closed shades.

Whatever dreams, hopes or aspirations he once had are long gone... This is a ghost of his former self.

It all shows on his face: the dark circles under his eyes; stubble that dots his gaunt cheeks; the tips of his long hair faintly bleached blonde, a feeble attempt at changing something in his life.

His alarm clock reads **1:33 P.M.**

JOSH

Just get up...

With a deep sigh he pushes the comforter off, revealing a bare mattress. The room is strangely impersonal. Pictures have been removed from their frames, pieces of his life discarded over time.

He pulls a bright neon Polo shirt out of a pile of dirty laundry and leaves the bedroom.

On the empty room, a title card appears:

**THREE YEARS LATER**

INT. PARTY WORLD - LATER

A hell of false, mass-produced happiness. Nauseating fluorescent lighting and bright colors. The store is unkempt and full of empty space.

Despite his circumstances, Josh has grown complacent with this life. He stocks an aisle with cheap, graduation-themed party supplies.

An inattentive father and his two kids enter the aisle.

JOSH  
*(customer service smile)*  
 Welcome to Party World, "where every  
 day--

They ignore him.

JOSH (CONT'D)  
 --is a celebration."

The children grab noisemakers and chase each other down the aisle, knocking displays of merchandise onto the floor.

JOSH  
 Whoopsie-daisy! Be careful...

The father follows his kids, leaving the mess.

FRONT COUNTER - LATER

Obnoxious SQUEALING from a HELIUM TANK. Josh is behind the counter blowing up balloons for a DEMANDING MOTHER.

DEMANDING MOTHER  
Excuse me. Son? That's not Batman,  
 is it? Don't you have any Batmans?

JOSH  
 Sorry ma'am, we're out of Batman.

DEMANDING MOTHER  
 Oh, great. Of course you are!  
*(sighs)* What do you have then?

JOSH  
 Well--

Josh pokes a hole in the balloon he was inflating and sucks in the helium--

JOSH  
*(high pitched voice)*  
 How 'bout the Chipmunks?

EXT. BACK PARKING LOT, PARTY WORLD - LATER

Josh takes a break out back with his boss, a burly guy named LARRY (20s).

Larry sits on the curb and smokes a cigarette. Josh fidgets behind him, about to ask something when--

LARRY

You play the new Modern Warfare?

JOSH

Modern Warfare? No-- the game?

LARRY

Fuuuck man - it's sick. Just buy it. Seriously, just go buy it.

JOSH

*(feigning interest)*

Yeah?

LARRY

's pretty much my whole weekend. Check it out-- the developers actually worked with the military so they could get everything like true life. The guns all sound and shoot authentically. All the orders you can give to your squad are authentic.

JOSH

Huh.

LARRY

Yeah dude. It's like a fuckin' simulator - and you really get a sense of different sectors in the military and loc-- uh, locales in the world.

JOSH

Sounds sick.

LARRY

You know there's somethin' called mechanical maintenance, where you can specialize in repairing tanks. I'd fuckin' rock that shit.

JOSH

True--

LARRY

And here's the thing: the army hooks you up. That'd really jump start my auto shop.

JOSH

Yeah, man. *(considers; then, sincerely)* Yeah. You should do it.

LARRY

Fuck yeah, man. I'd show 'em how it's done.

He flicks his cigarette and gets up. Break's over.

JOSH

*(quickly)*

Hey Larry - d'you think you could spot me twenty bucks? I'll pay ya back on Friday.

LARRY

Huh? Oh. Yeah man. *(reaches for his wallet)* Uh, just hit me back whenever.

He hands Josh a twenty and heads back into the store.

LARRY

*(back to business)*

Oh, bro - try not to be late again tomorrow.

INT. LIQUOR STORE - EVENING

Josh routinely goes straight for the whiskey. At the front counter he plops down Larry's twenty. Receives a few dollars and change back.

INT. JOSH'S SUBARU - MINUTES LATER

The old, rundown Subaru chugs along. Josh glances at the dashboard-- the gas light urgently blinks. He shifts the car into neutral and coasts through an intersection.

INT. GAS STATION

He drops the few dollars and change on the counter.

JOSH

*(to female attendant)*

Hi! Four thirty-five on station three, please.

INT./EXT. JOSH'S SUBARU - LAKE VIEW ESTATES - EVENING

Josh recklessly speeds through the neighborhood and arrives at his one-story home. The house and lawn's appearance are in serious need of upkeep.



INT. FOYER, JOSH'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Josh steps into the dark foyer; the very act drains all his energy. He is now alone with nothing but his thoughts.

LIVING ROOM

He drops the mail onto his desk, separating all the bills into piles.

A postcard from **St. Mary's Church** is among the mail. He tosses it in the trash.

He turns on the TELEVISION and walks away, letting the SOUNDS fill the house.

KITCHEN, VARIOUS

Now in his pajamas, he pours himself some whiskey.

He prepares a microwave dinner. Dirty dishes fill the sink. Rotting fruit in a bowl on the counter.

JOSH

Gotta clean...

At the table he makes a call on his cell. It rings several times before going to:

DANIEL'S VOICE

*(imitating an automated machine)*

Hello. You-have-reached. Daniel. Colton. I am not a-vail-a-ble. Please. Leave. Your. Name-and-number and I will re-turn-your call. Thank you.

JOSH

*(in an impromptu, poetic rhythm)*

It's me again. / You're one true friend. / I'm loungin' in the den. / 'Till the bitter end. / Where have you been?

*(beat)*

Hey, Daniel. Just... tryin' to find out if you're actually coming home from L.A. Call me back I guess.

He hangs up. A beat. What to do next?

LIVING ROOM - LATER

At his desk he goes through various medical bills, loans, and bank statements. He writes different expenses in columns on a legal pad labeled **Mom - April**.

Josh puts his pen down, frustrated and overwhelmed.

KITCHEN

He pours another whiskey.

LIVING ROOM

He clears out a nearly empty bookshelf, stacking books into a box labeled **BOOKS TO SELL**. After some second thought he pulls out an older, hardcover book and places it back on the shelf.

A TV SHOW is on:

VOICE FROM TV (O.S.)

Well I guess that's why they call it  
"Three Men and a Baby"!

Canned SITCOM LAUGHTER. Josh perks up and starts watching. The camera cuts to DANIEL, sitting in a café with a smarmy look. Cut to commercials.

KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

He checks a **TO DO** list posted to the fridge. Trivial tasks. He crosses one off.

JOSH'S HOUSE - SERIES OF SHOTS

He replaces a light bulb in the bathroom.

JOSH

Let there be light...

Fixes a shaky doorknob in the guest room. A short laugh to himself.

Dusts off the piano in the living room.

He rearranges pillows on the couch.

Walks through the house, stands in each room and looks for anything to keep himself occupied.

He stands in the doorway to Candice's vacant room... but decides against going in.

He sits on the couch. Drinks his whiskey. Mindlessly shuffles things around on the coffee table.

LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

His whiskey is finished and the TELEVISION is OFF. He's now slumped on the couch. Nothing left to do. The house is a silent, lonely void.

We stay on him for a long, hard minute.

FADE OUT.