1977

Midnight on Harbor Street

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Recommended Citation
Available at: http://scholarworks.wmich.edu/calliope/vol1977/iss1/20
MIDNIGHT ON HARBOR STREET

Midnight.
Translucent white draperies filter the moonlight as it bathes their bedroom in a gentle pool of shadows. The grandfather clock in the corner groans persistently as Mrs. Miller and her husband sleep on opposite sides of their spacious king size bed. Their agelessly old Siamese cat purrs contentedly on the bed between her two owners.

Mr. Miller takes a heavy breath and rolls over on his stomach, burying his head in his two fluffy pillows.

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Three blocks away, on Juliet Street, a hungry Beagle overturns a trash can in the alley, and feasts on the leftovers of that evenings meat loaf. Towards town, down the road, two drunken poker players fight over their last hand. One of the men is thrown down the basement stairs of the house... the other three men laugh gaily in drunken delight of their companion's misfortune.

In the offices of the local newspaper, three men in loosened ties and unbuttoned shirtsleeves debate over the contents of tomorrow's Sport's section.

But, tonight, in the Miller's bedroom...silence.

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Suddenly, the phone.
Mrs. Miller has the receiver in her hands before the other inhabitants of the bedroom stir. She knows who it will be.

The familiar voice of their only son fills the receiver. He lives just two blocks up the hill on Harbor Street. Since he left the house (much to the insistence of his father) two summers ago, at the age of twenty-seven, to marry his girlfriend, he has kept in constant communication with his mother... as he has since he was born. Often he would call her late at night, and talk endlessly about his life. His mother was always ready to give him the assurance and wisdom that he so badly lusted for. Receiving her motherly warmth was what little David lived for.

Tonight, it is the same. Troubles with his wife, Anne. Frustration about his work at his father's insurance company. Sadness. Despair.

But Mom listens on...patiently waiting for her son to finish so she can pour on him her affection and support...so he will be satisfied...so she can go back to sleep.

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She can remember those days long ago when she would walk him to school in the morning, encouraging him to make friends. Sometimes he would come home during school, crying, saying that they were making fun of him and teasing him. She would put her arms around him and whisper to him, telling him what a kind, sweet boy he is. Soon, his tears would disappear and he would be happy again.

She can remember when he joined Cub Scouts...how he never wanted to go to their meetings. When he did go to them, he stood alone in the corner, staring
at all of the other kids. Soon after joining, he announced to his parents that he was quitting Cub Scouts because it was all so "dumb"...so "stupid." He never went to another meeting.

And when he met Anne, his first and only girlfriend. She always called him. They would never go out anywhere. David preferred to stay home with his parents. They gave him money to take her out to dinner, but he rarely took her out. She loved him anyway.

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Mrs. Miller waits on, as her son rambles on.

But tonight, he sounds different somehow, more intense. He was drunk, as usual, but he sounded more urgent than usual.

Suddenly, he paused, and then continued, "Mom? Mama? You there Mom? Good...uh...Mama? I've decided to do something Mama. Anne is gone again...who knows where she is...So I've decided...to...kill myself...Mama...I think...I don't know why not...I have this neat little pistol that..."

With a sigh, Mrs. Miller put the phone on its hook, and quietly put on her slippers and her bathrobe, and slipped out of the bedroom and out of the house...down the two blocks up Harbor Street to David's house.

The cat sleepily changes her position on the soft bed, and returns to her deep and satisfying sleep. Mr. Miller snores softly to himself.

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Nearby, on the freeway, a sixteen wheel truck skids off the pavement and into the soggy median. A State Police car calls for help and stands outside, talking to the driver.

In town, the Pizza King manager turns the lights off and locks the doors to his store. He climbs in his car and speeds off towards his home five miles away.

Nearby, a resident discovers a wastebasket on fire in his kitchen and dumps a tub full of dishwater on the blaze, dousing it completely. He sighs in relief as he sets the empty tub back in the sink.

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Mrs. Miller ascends the stony sidewalk towards her son's house. The air is humid, creating thick clouds of light around each of the street lamps over the road. Flies and mosquitoes hover around each light.

As she reaches his house, she notices Anne's yellow Mustang is not in the driveway. The only light on in the house is in his study off the living room.

She walks right in the house and heads for the study.

David is sitting on the floor of his study, tangled in the long telephone cord. He thinks he is still talking to his mother. A half empty bottle of whiskey lies on its side on the desk. Several beer cans cover the floor.

David sits in his underwear and a faded old pajama shirt...playing with a gun in his hands.

As he looks up at his new visitor, she lunges at him for the gun. He yanks it away, by reflex...and watches as his mother falls to the floor in a heap.

Down the road, Mr. Miller turns over once again, and farts with a contented sigh.

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"You didn't have to come up here, Mom. You know that don't you?"

Mrs. Miller stares intently at her son, sitting against the wall with his legs crossed. She plots with her motherly genius...how to calm her son again.

"Davey? Tell me about your troubles, son. Tell me all about them. Tell me about Anne. Tell me about your work. Please. Where is Anne? Tell me why Anne is gone, Davey."

David stares at his mother, puzzled. Soon, he begins explaining to her what happened. He tells her about their argument, about her yelling at him...insulting him. He tells her about the way Anne bosses him around, tells him what to do.

Then he tells her about his job, how he is not going to get that manager's job for another six months or so...how they're all out to get him because he is the boss's son. He tells her about his supervisor who is always watching him. He cries as he speaks...whining.

Finally, he finishes his tale. He watches his mother anxiously, awaiting her anticipated return. Awaiting her special brand of affection and love.

"Awww, c'mon Davey, it's not THAT BAD...you know that. C'mon, close to Mommy..." Davey sets the gun down and crawls to his mother. She continues.

"You shouldn't let these little things bother you, Son. Anne will be back, really. She loves you. She knows you are a fine person...a great man. And, and you're job. Things aren't that bad there either. Your Father tells me that you are doing quite well, as a matter of fact. He says you are 'really getting to know the ropes.'" David looks down at the floor in his mother's arms, listening. He has heard this speech at least seventy times in the past two years, but he still enjoys hearing it.

"You are a decent, responsible person, David. You are friendly, sincere, hard working, honest, and fun to be with. Everybody knows that. They talk about what a marvelous human being you are all the time. In the supermarket, at the laundramat...they talk about you, Davey, how lucky I am to have a son like you. Really."

"Really, Mum?"

"Really."

"Promise?"

"Sure. You have nothing to be ashamed of."

David looks up at his mother, with a smile on his face, and breathes a sigh of relief. Mrs. Miller realizes that, once again, her job is done, successfully. She rises to her feet, and walks out of the room. She doesn't look back, but she knows her son is watching her happily.

"Good night, Mama. I feel lots better now. Thanks."

The grandfather clock chimes once in the bedroom, and continues ticking.

Mrs. Miller slowly stumbles down the steep grade back towards her home, and her soft bed. The moonlight provides ample light, along with the dim streetlights above. The night is warm, and muggy...not a night to be out for too long.

Suddenly, a voice from behind...the same voice.
She turns, looks up the hill back to David's house. He is standing in the middle of the road, under a light, with the pistol cocked and pointed at his head. The flies hover around the light, creating flickering shadows on the lone figure in the empty street.

Whitefaced, Mrs. Miller helplessly watches her son. "Mom? Sorry, Mom. It's not going to work this time!" David's hand shakes. His voice, hoarse and dry, cracks as he speaks. "It's not going to work again, Mom! I'm sorry, it's not your fault."

"But Davey, we all love..."

A loud shot broke the stillness on Harbor Street. Only this time, Mr. Miller is awakened, as is the cat.

Blocks away, the poker players resume their game.