

## **“Hello, Father”**

Madison Michaud  
Erskine Academy

Fear is a great motivator. It drives everything that humans do, really. Some might think of it as cowardly, what Mr. Morrison did, but if they were in his situation, would they have acted any different? Most likely, no. But they weren't involved in the circumstances, and empathy is not a common trait amidst our modern society. So, out of fear, Mr. Morrison hid him away, like a dark family secret, enveloped in the folds of a dynasty's archives. But, the prisoner mentioned above was a resilient soul, and he would not be concealed.

Mrs. Sheils was getting older. Walking up and down the great marble staircase, which was the centerpiece of the old mansion, was getting harder each trip. But, the silver in the even more glamorous upper dining hall would not shine itself, would it? The floors wouldn't wash themselves, would they? That thing, wouldn't prepare its own meals, would it? No. So, Mrs. Sheils wrapped her bony, weathered, pale hand around the banister and bolstered herself up, then ascended the stairs once again.

Sometimes it got lonely in the big house. It had been filled with such joy at one time, music and laughter bounced off the walls and through the corridors, but it was all a pleasant facade over the darkness that lurked in the corners. But, people see what they want, and the Morrison Mansion was always an exuberant place.

The Morrison's went far back. Their history intertwined with the history of the town, their business was what funded the livelihoods of many of those that settled there. A well respected family, many thought of them as a dynasty, and the town was their kingdom. The mayor was often seen at their extravagant dinner parties, along with his staff. Needless to say, the mayor would always be ready to do a favor or two for the man of the house.

The man of the house. He was alone now. His wife had passed on long ago. The doctors couldn't tell what sickness ailed her. In the end, the expert opinion of the local garrulous biddies resolved she died of a broken heart. Struck by grief, the gruff old man turned to the bottle to deal with his pain. The event was enough to make anyone go mad, never mind the passing of their beloved shortly after. After the event, the family faded from the social scene. The building that once housed such commotion, now was as silent and as dark as the night on new moon.

The old man usually took to sitting in front of the fire, his pipe in one hand, and his glass in the other. There was no knowing what those milky eyes saw, but he stared into the fire, intently, as if it was telling him a gripping story. Every day, Mrs. Sheils would bring him porridge at dawn, soup at lunch, and again at dinner. Her skills in the kitchen diminished, for she only had to cook for two and herself, which was nothing compared to the feasts of before. The old man did not notice though, he tasted nothing but his drink, and the sorrow he wallowed in.

“Evening, Mr. Morrison.” His blank stare did not falter from the fire. “I brought you your soup, where would you like me to set it?” He merely grunted, and Mrs. Sheils set the tray down on the table next to him, as usual. “He was at it again.” His stare did not move. “I’m afraid that the lock won’t be able to handle the amount of stress he’s been putting on it.” Again, no response. “What if he gets out? What if he, what if your son does it again?” Mrs. Sheils merely mumbled the last of her proposition, but Mr. Morrison heard it.

In a fit of rage, he jumped from the chair, spilling his drink, and flinging his pipe. The chair slid back aggressively, and it knocked the table, sending the tray and its contents crashing to the ground.

“Do not speak of that thing to me! He is not my son! He is a monster! A demon! A devil! That thing has none of my son left in him, his inside is a deep hole, and has consumed every last bit of the child I once knew! How dare you speak of him like that! Get out! Get out of my sight!” he continued to bellow, his face turned red, and spittle flew from his gaping mouth. Mrs. Sheils hurried from the room as fast as she could, hastily shutting the door behind her. As she scuttled down the long hallway, she heard his screams turn into woeful wails, and sobs. Mr. Morrison was a tortured soul, and was apt to outbursts like this from time to time. They scared Mrs. Sheils, but she did not blame him.

He chuckled. Even from the attic he could hear the affair. He moved from his chair and towards the vent in the floor, where the noise was coming from.

“What a pathetic example of humanity my father is.” His voice had become raspy over the years. He had no one to hold conversation with, but himself. “This is your fault old man! Your fault, your fault, your fault!” he called down the shaft, cupping his hands around his mouth, to ensure the old man would hear it. The wailing from below intensified, as he instigated his father. He banged on the vent, mimicked the cries that protruded from it, and laughed maniacally. His laughter swelled viciously, his dark eyes grew wide, and his yellowed teeth jutted out from behind two dried, cracked lips. He jumped from the chair, and jumped around the room, stomping on the floor, banging on the walls, making as much noise as he could possibly muster. His laughter turned into a holler, holler into scream, and scream into screech. A screech that Mr. Morrison and Mrs. Sheils could never get used to, because it wasn’t a noise that any human could possibly create from their vocal cords, without splitting them. No, it sent shivers through their bodies, formed goosebumps on their skin, and made them constantly look back to make sure the shadows in the room had stayed in their rightful place. He knew the chill that his fits gave the house, and he enjoyed it. Some nights he would go on, almost until dawn’s embracing palms pushed brushed away the frost from the night before. He knew he was torturing the old man, he practically worshipped it.

He glanced out the window, and noticed the position of the moon in the sky. Mrs. Sheils would be making him his soup soon.

“Poor gullible, innocent, naive, pitiful Mrs. Sheils.” he murmured to himself. He picked up his chair that he had thrown across the room, and placed it in its usual spot in front of the writing desk. There was an array of literary works spread out on the flat top, and even more piled on

the ground surrounding it. He had read them many times, and could recite them word for word. Often, he would recite them, in the middle of the night, at the top of his lungs, right next to the vent in the floor.

“Father, are you getting lonely down there? Don’t you want some- company?” He jested like this often. “Poor poor father, all alone in this big house, with only a housemaid to keep him sane! Too bad mother isn’t here. But that’s right. She’s dead. D E A D. As a doornail. You know why father? She died because of you. You locked me up here, and she was so sad that it killed her!” His laughter erupted again, and transformed into rage filled screams. He taunted the old man, made a chant, and repeated it over and over again. Suddenly, he fell quiet. He dropped to the ground, and placed his ear on the cold, wooden ground of the attic. He could hear a board creaking in the stairway outside his door. “Father?” His tone and manner had totally changed, now resembling an innocent, innocuous child, yet, his speech was also slow and eerie. “Father? I- I know you can hear me. Please, father, let me out. I’m so very lonely up here. I’m sorry for the way I’ve acted, it was wrong. Shame on me. I’ve learned my lesson. Please, please, let me out.”

The creaking stopped, just outside of the door. The stream of light that came through the peephole from the stairs was now broken, and the room fell even darker. He cocked his head, still on all fours, and stared intently at the light creeping in from under the door, like a predator stalking its prey. His muscles tensed, ready. The padlock clicked off, and the door cracked open. A slow, malicious grin formed on his face.

“Hello, father.”