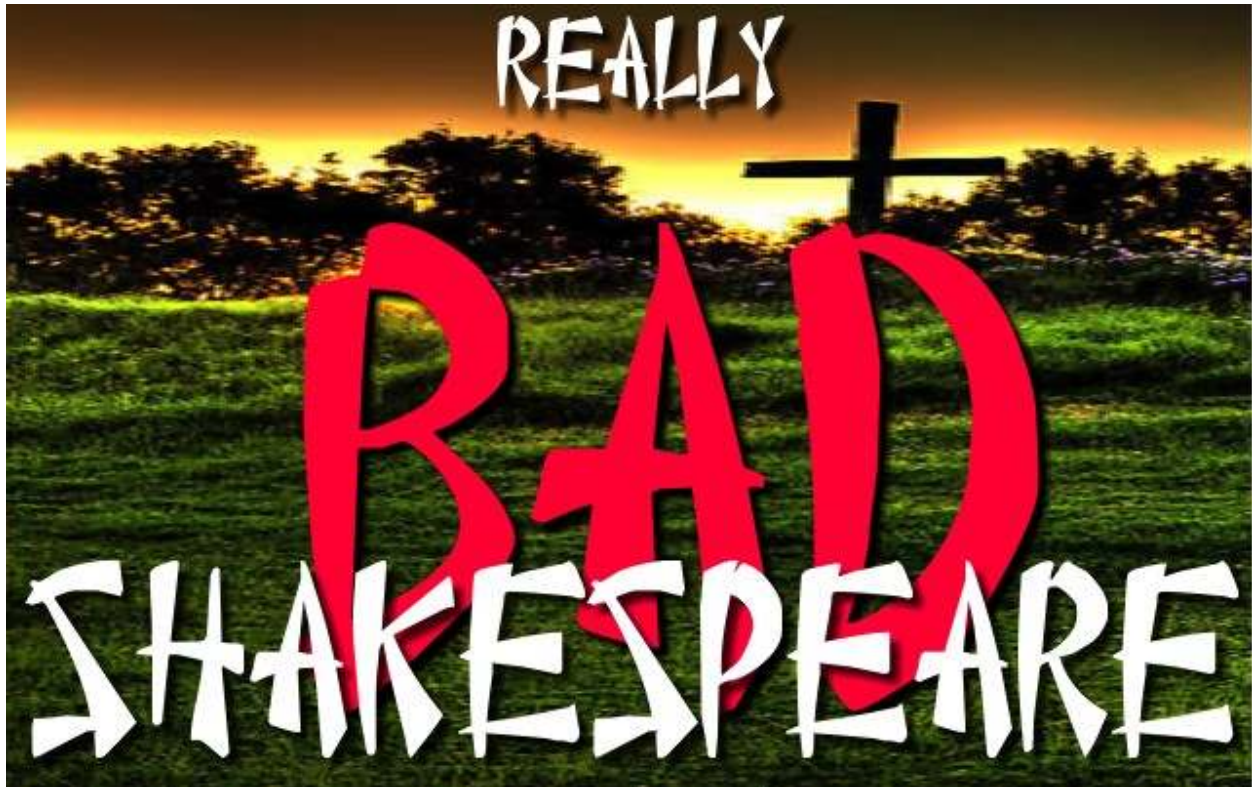


The Writer's Expanded Collection of

Season One



Watch the really BAD Shakespeare promotional video by clicking on the following link:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kAzLQXPKv1g&feature=channel>

really BAD Shakespeare
By Weeb (R. E. Heinrich)
© May 2010

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means, including photocopying, recording or by any information storage and retrieval systems, without the written permission of the author.

Episode 1: **The Telephone Call**

I don't care if you believe me or not – there's never been an innocent who didn't want to die. You, the so-called intelligent and God-inspired opposable thumbed mammals who rule this planet, will ALWAYS fight for survival. Don't let anyone tell you different. No matter the reason or cause, how real or petty, we will die happily for our beliefs. Eventually, everyone will reach their limit... right down to the weakest, most passive loving member of the tribe. And, once that imaginary line of "*no return*" is crossed and the final insult thrown and daggers drawn, we will ultimately take the proverbial bull by the horns and wrestle him to the ground... or die trying.

And why is this?

Opposable thumbs.

I have a request.

It's an unusual request, but I have to make it anyway... Do you have any liquor in the house? Marijuana? Prescription pills that can be abused? Anything, anything at all that can alter your present conscious state?

I can wait while you gather these necessary materials...

... ..

... ..

...

Back already?

I see you poured yourself a cocktail... hey, you going to hold that joint all night or light it? We need to get this reality started.

While you induce and indulge, let me explain why I've requested this. See, from this

point forward, I'll need your mind altered... altered beyond what members of the opposable thumbs tribe perceive as reality. In order for you to understand the complicated simplicity of one man's life as he reaches the end of his rope, your reality needs to be viewed through a dense fog of alteration to qualify the distorted facts, images, and memories needed to obtain an honest experience.

Go ahead... I'll wait for you...

... .. there, feeling good now?

It starts with a man's voice on an answering machine:

BEEP

"It's me – just letting you know I'm fucking sick of all the fucking head games you fucking asshole. Really fucking sick of it! We fucking could've had a real fucking thing going here but no, you fucking decided to stick with your Father. Well, the fucking line has been fucking drawn now! I feel like you fucking played me. Listen, I'm fucking sick of all the hurt and lies and bullshit you keep blowing up my ass... As far as I'm concerned, from this fucking point forward, you're fucking dead in my eyes! Don't fucking ever call me or try to fucking get a hold of me... just fucking die already."

With one final display of overtly dramatic and extremely stereotypical non-heterosexual behavior, I raised the black and pitted pay-phone receiver above my head, stretching the twisted metal cable to its entire length of two feet, and brought it down forcefully onto the metal hook. BAAAAAMMMM!! The sound reverberated in front of the convenience store like a gunshot.

The late night crowd of about ten Latinos gathered outside the Seven-Eleven, who were enjoying the mid-summer night, jumped at the sound. Several younger members of the teenage gang ducked in their attempt to miss the stray bullet they assumed was headed their way. Several members of the gang laughed at their comrades actions. The humiliated boys turned toward me... sizing me up, whispering, and preparing for the possible attack against me.

Ignoring them, I turned from the bank of phones and started walking toward the street. My heart beat madly and my hands, covered in a pair of black leather gloves, shook with anger.

There was no going back.

The call was made...

My nemesis would get the message loud and clear on Monday morning when his sweet old secretary presented him with the morning's messages: "Good morning Mr. Shepherd, hope you enjoyed your weekend. Not many messages this morning... There is one though that I think you should listen to yourself. The caller didn't leave a name or a number but, to condense the message into reasonable terms, he basically said not to ever contact him again. The truly amazing thing is that he managed to say 'fuck' sixteen times in less than 15 seconds."

Endings are a curious thing.

They are like horror movies – just when you think the film's over, and the last big busted brassiere clad high-heeled babe has been killed, it all starts over again with yet another big busted brassiere clad high-heeled babe running for her life through a darkened, supposedly haunted house from a cannibalistic leather clad fucker with a chainsaw in one hand and a really big hook in the other. In such situations, no one is actually safe until the credits roll and the screen goes black. Only then can you sigh in relief, knowing fully that the ending has arrived and it's time to stand up and brush away the crumbs of memories better left in the theater, and walk out that revolving door to face the strange and disturbing "Beginning" that's waiting for you outside... in reality.

The first ending is usually the hardest.

That's when all the pain and suppressed suffering is released... when every second, minute, hour, day, week, month, year, decade of emotional decay surges forward and is spewed

venomously with no thought of recourse. It's an emotional need to hurt the other party. To watch the sickening realization that something serious isn't right – something that an "I'm sorry, won't ever happen again" will not repair.

The eyes tell it all.

Just watch as the first verbal slap is delivered: "Every fucking thing wrong with my life is directly associated with you. You have caused me nothing but pain and hurt since the first day I met you. I can't do this anymore. I can not allow this to happen anymore. You are nothing more than a cancer in my life... and I am cutting that sickness away."

Watch closely...

here it comes:

Hurt... pity... anger... love.

Memories are a precarious thing.

Throughout our lives, we embrace these mental fabrications as fact with never a hint of question. From the tragic innocence of birth to the disgrace of liberating death, we allow these remembrances to form our greater character... shaping us from formless masses of clay into something distinct, something REAL.

It is because of this that we begin to repress, and then deny, the reality of our memories.

Over time, these experiences become selective. We learn how to savor the agreeable and contradict the offensive. Through subconscious deception, our memories become what we wished. We create false memories to replace the ones repressed; we begin to contradict, to reject, to sabotage; then, we begin to forget... allowing the replaced to become true.

We are nothing more than prisoners of our memories.

It's the middle of the afternoon.

I'm five.

The curtains in my parent's bedroom are closed. A thin band of sunlight breaks the darkness, dividing it... We crouch in a distant corner, the darkest in the room. I stare in wide-

eyed amazement at the dim illumination coming from the glow-in-the-dark wristwatch. That's one reason for the closed curtains - to see the novelty of the watch.

The owner of the watch is a twenty-something male neighbor. He shares the darkness with me. We huddle together and stare at the glowing timepiece. His arm tightens around my shoulder.

"Pretty cool, huh?" He says, his face rubbing slightly against mine. "Just got it yesterday and knew you'd love to see it."

"Neat," I grin in admiration. The attention thrills me. I move closer, pressing against him, wanting to savor the moment of having an adult treat me like an equal. He is my friend, my very special friend...

After several silent minutes, I look up and ask: "Can I touch it?"

And, that's the other reason...

Listen!

Can you hear it happening?

Repress and deny...

No stopping "it" now.

With a sense of accomplishment, I held my head high and nonchalantly approached the thugs. As I got closer, I could hear their disjointed conversation: "*That dude just told someone to fucking die... Damn, that's cold... let's rob him, looks like he's got money... not him... look at those eyes... wonder if he broke that phone... am sure we can take him... ya' if the phones broke we're the ones who'll be blamed for it... fucking white people... no, leave him alone... look at those eyes... bless us, Jesus...*"

Directly in front of them, I stopped... turned toward them, and smiled.

Not knowing why, every single one of them stepped back.

Several of the devout even crossed themselves.

Please allow me to introduce myself. My name is Shakespeare...

Shakespeare Williams...

and I'm the antichrist.

End of episode 1

Episode 2: **The Long Walk Home**

On my walk back to the apartment, on that fine mid-summer's eve, there was a spring in my step. I felt accomplished – on top of the world, so to say. Nothing could have made me happier. A new emotion coursed through my system, an emotion I have never experienced before... an emotion known as Pride.

Pride goes before destruction

(Proverbs 16:18-19)

By making that telephone call, I set in motion the start of Armageddon. The bluff was played and I was walking home a winner... you know, sometimes an antichrist has to do what an antichrist has to do.

There's no "official" rule book here when one starts Armageddon.

There are times when we must draw inspiration from our forefathers, the antichrists before us... and there has been many before me.

Look through your history books. Every generation has faced its own antichrist in some form or matter.

We – the bringers of Armageddon – each generation moves it forward, learning from the mistakes of our forefathers... Take for instance – France. There was Napoleon. He was the perfect antichrist archetype: He wanted to conquer the world and create endless wars, while deceiving his believers of his God-like, totalitarian rule; he was an influential speaker that people followed without question as they lost the ability to discern between the truth and lies; his supporters followed him into battles that he declared, boldly and without humility, were for the betterment of the world – anyone not believing in HIS beliefs, HIS world vision, were killed without remorse; and, in layman terms, he was just not a nice guy.

The only thing missing from making him the TRUE antichrist was that he didn't have seven heads and ten horns. Though, honestly, that could all be figuratively speaking and not an actuality.

Then there was good-ole Adolf Hitler, another prime archetype (Rule the World - CHECK; Do Anything to Accomplish this Goal – DOUBLE CHECK), followed by Stalin (CHECK, CHECK, CHECK), and recently ending with Mr. Rogers (CHECK to the nth degree. With the popularity of television and children's programming, Mr. Rogers became the true Master of Antichristdom!).

Hey, it's not like you never suspected.

But, you see, all of these men were only a precursor to my creation. They were the ones who tested the waters of human evolution, plotting and perfecting the best way in which to lead all of you opposable thumbed creatures to the slaughter. They handed this information down from generation to generation... from Alexander, to Hitler, to Stalin, to Mr. Rogers...

Which brings us full circle and back to me...

Shakespeare Williams.

I am 25 years old and live in the third largest city in Illinois, Potter's Field (under the shade of Megiddo Mountain and the banks of the mighty Kikawa River). Potter's Field is the largest corn producing city in southern mid-central Illinois, with a growing population of about 167,831. Although the city teams with as much history as Chicago, geologists and historians continuously often overlook Potter's Field shadowy existence.

The city's roots date back to 1789, when Roberto La Salle founded a discount trading post along the banks of the Kikawa River. With the strategic placement of the store at a pass where a natural trail lead through the Megiddo Mountain and ended at the Kikawa River, business at the Kikawa Discount Outpost and thrived. He befriended the neighboring Kikawa

Indians through massive bottles of whiskey to keep them under control; he supplied the travelers headed west with dry goods and flints and other necessary equipment needed for their travels through the heartland; and, if the price was right, he would even let you fuck his wife.

At the time, he was a real modern day entrepreneur.

Within years, a town formed around the Discount Outpost and it was called Kikawa. The town grew about 100 strong and, for almost sixty years, they coexisted peacefully with the Kikawa Indians.

But all good things must eventually come to an end.

In the summer of 1848, there was a drought on whiskey. No one knows why, but the Kikawa Discount Outpost ran out of the precious liquid. Blame it on the suppliers or whomever, but this was definitely not a good thing to happen.

For some strange, unknown reason, the peace loving Kikawa Indians rose up and, in a bloody and violent confrontation, killed all 153 of the townspeople.

Leaving the town a...

potter's field.

My trek home brought me to the intersection of Sunrise Highway and Brooklyn Avenue. On a light pole on the opposite side of the dark deserted highway, a red "don't walk" sign flashed. I stopped and waited for it to change... transfixed by the rhythmic pulse of the image... lost in the **flash... flash... flash...** the symbolic meaning, line through a man, the wars, the deaths...

Armageddon was coming and so many were going to die!

Hallelujah! Praise... ME!

I laughed, and continued to wait for the light to change.

There are many forms of abuse.

There's verbal, physical, mental, economic sexual... just to name a few.

When you are the antichrist you LEARN about abuse at an EARLY age. It always starts

subtly, an offhanded degrading comment here... a gentle, but firm slap there. You learn from it. New emotions form, creating and molding, always changing. You find ways to deal, to understand, to grow with this forbidden knowledge buried deep within you. This is the pain you suffer when you are the antichrist.

“I’ll be your God...” you tell them, *“Just don’t leave bruises.”*

A group of twenty tourists (out with their charcoals and paper to sketch the natural beauty of the Midwest) found the town of Kikawa three weeks later.

The artists could smell the stink of the dead for miles.

Without thought of their safety, the tourists captured the Kikawa Chief and questioned him about all the death and destruction. In a voice filled with shame, he said that the Great Dark Spirit of the Earth had come forth and overwhelmed almost every member of the tribe. Over a period of increasingly hot days, the tribe members started having hallucinations and bad dreams. They became fatigued and easily excited. Anxiety filled every waking hour. Soon, fever and convulsions gripped the serene people. The Shaman blamed the neighboring French-Canadians – saying they were the ones who brought the Dark Spirit that plagued them. If they were to survive, they needed to defeat the white intruders and take back their land. Only then would the Dark Spirit be appeased.

So, without further delay, they did.

They killed every man, woman and child without remorse.

Though the Indians were very, very apologetic, the tourists decided that the best way to deal with the situation was to wipe the tribe completely off the face of the Earth. All 59 members of the Kikawa Indians were shot and buried in a mass grave on the banks of the Kikawa River... in the shade of Megiddo Mountain.

Through a reporting error at the time, this backwater town soon became known as the town of Potter’s Field instead of Kikawa City. Reports told how the once friendly Indians of the area rose up and killed all 212 of the God-fearing French-Canadians for no reason whatsoever.

Nothing was ever mentioned about the whiskey drought of that summer.

Thanks to the tourists' artistic talents, this nightmarish piece of history was immortalized in standard pen and ink drawings and watercolor. Many can still be seen today displayed proudly in the history section of the Potter's Field Museum of Natural History.

*Now don't get all religious right-wing on me here...
all of you knew Armageddon would happen one day.
I guess you just didn't think it would be happening NOW.
So sorry...*

I was five when I discovered that I was to be the TRUE antichrist.

I was hiding under a bush... tears in my eyes and blood running down my nose. The educational system on the farm was getting more intense.

Suddenly, the limbs of the bush parted and an older man dressed in 1700's French attire stared down at me. The smell of sulfur filled the air. He smiled, his painted red lips seemed to stretch from ear to ear. He spoke in a heavily accented voice: "I am pleased to meet you Shakespeare. We have so much to discuss."

We stared at each other, studying, looking for weaknesses. Finding none, I stood and approached him.

He took my bloodied face in his hand and shook his head disapprovingly. "This will not do," he said. In a flourish of disapproval, he brought out a hand stitched kerchief from his jacket pocket and cleaned the blood from my face.

"This will all make sense soon enough," he whispered.

He took my hand...

and led me deeper into the woods.

Don't walk

Don't walk

Flashing **red**

My mind going a hundred miles an hour...

Every emotion one could possible experience coursed through my body...

I was – pardon the expression:

in complete heaven.

So, when the light changed,

without a care in the world...

I stepped into the street.

End of episode 2

Episode 3: **Much Ado about Beatrice**

Meanwhile, many blocks away, in a car loaded with their life's possessions...

When the rusted-out, 1980 GMC Pacer rolled to a stop in the middle of Sunrise Highway, Beatrice's hands tightened around the steering wheel. Her broken and chipped nails pressed deeply into the leather clad wheel, wishing it was the throat of the overweight mechanic who earlier reassured her that the car worked fine. Her expressive, doe-like brown eyes welled with tears as she watched black smoke spiral from under the car's hood and drift ominously into the dark midsummer's night.

She inhaled deeply (as if inhaling on a cigarette), counted silently to ten, and willed herself to remain calm and, no matter how good it would make her feel, she told herself that she did not NEED a cigarette.

Oh god, she said to herself, a Virginia Slim would taste so good right about now.

A rogue wind traveled down the highway.

It moved to the left, and then quickly shifted to the right... dancing gleefully in her freedom.

Caught in the winds trajectory, various small pieces of garbage followed. An empty plastic grocery bag, one ripped page from the Potter's Field Daily News, dirt and fallen leaves... even a crumpled, empty Virginia Slims' box swirled haphazardly in the wind's movement...

When the wind approached the stalled car, it became aware of the woman and five year old boy sitting inside. Amaunet, the Egyptian Goddess of air and wind, could tell that tension hung thickly inside the vehicle. The occupants looked so sad, so defeated.

Amaunet howled and whistled a greeting... and, just for the fun of it, tossed the crumpled, empty pack of Virginia Slims at the windshield.

Beatrice blinked.

An empty pack of Virginia Slims, HER favorite brand of cigarette, slapped against the windshield. Her eyes locked on the long sleek white box... hunger, lust, desire... the pack hung there for only a brief second... taunting, teasing... before taking wing again.

Unfortunately, the damage was done.

After 5 months of sheer torture and hell to stop - Beatrice WAS GOING TO SMOKE AGAIN. This was a sign. The Gods, not quite sure which one actually fell under the title of Smoke Corrupter, had loudly announced that she should take up smoking again... and immediately!

It's not fair, her mind screamed in a murderous rage.

"Fucking assholes," she accidentally mumbled under her breath.

"Did you say something, Mommy?" Aaron, her son, asked as he sat patiently in the passenger seat.

Don't cry in front of the boy, Beatrice cautioned herself.

With a forced smile, she spoke in a calm, controlled voice: "Nothing important... I'm sorry about all of this, but I need to ask you a really big favor. Can we sit here quietly for a moment? Mommy needs to think for a few minutes about what we're going to do. The car's broke and we're stranded..."

"It'll be okay, Mommy" Aaron said reassuringly. He looked out the side window and up at the starry sky. The moon was full and filled the night around them with its light. Aaron searched the sky for a moment, as if looking for a sign, before he said: "Besides... it's not time yet. We still have a few minutes."

Time, the fundamental structure of the universe, is nothing more than a dimension in which events transpire in sequence. Every dimension exists in its own time, defining its own quantities and velocity in a circular manner.

Ever turning, creating new possibilities...

Always creating new possibilities and meanings.

Beatrice glanced at the rearview mirror and, through the darkness, saw the look of defeat masking her round olive-complected face. She appeared much older than 25. Dark rings ran under her eyes, her once auburn hair now a tired mouse brown... no longer the high school beauty everyone admired and wanted to marry; now, just another statistic – just another single mother doing everything in her power to provide for her child.

Even if it meant working three jobs to put a roof over their heads... even if it meant giving up any hope of a personal life... even if it meant going without, just to make sure Aaron had everything... even if it meant a lifetime of loneliness and unspeakable regret... even if...

Defeated, Beatrice withdrew from the reflection and ran her hands through her shaggy home-cut hair. Nothing in life was easy. Since the divorce, Beatrice changed from a meek timid country girl to a strong-willed city woman who swore to never rely on another individual again – no matter what. She did not accept handouts, either financial or emotional. She was strong. She could provide for Aaron and herself without help from anyone.

Never again would she allow herself to trust.

People weren't worth the price of the pain.

Emotional Pain: Pain created by intense emotions and underlying neurological disorders, resulting in physical symptoms... usually a feeling of ripping, of tearing.

"They all leave in the end," she said under her breath. Emotionally overloaded, she laid her forehead on the steering wheel and closed her eyes.

She was losing it.

When will the struggling stop? I'm a good person. I don't hurt others. My God, how long does this fight to regain my dignity take? When will life start going right for us? Christ, I can't take the bullshit anymore. The fighting isn't worth the struggle... Why should I continue? What do I have to show for all my hard work and pain?

"Nothing. I have nothing..."

"Mommy," Aaron replied in a hushed voice. He reached out and placed a small, caring hand on his mother's leg.

Beatrice lifted her head and looked at her son, "Yes, dear."

"I think it's time." He leaned forward and looked up at the sky through the windshield. He giggled as a dark cloud passed across the moon. "Yep, it's time, Mommy. Try to start the car now."

"Aaron, there's no use. We'll only run down the battery."

"Please, just one more time."

"One more time it is then."

She pressed slightly on the gas peddle and tuned the key...

the car coughed, groaned...

more black smoke rose from the engine...

the engine turned over...

it caught, continued...

then started.

The motor roared to life.

"I'll be damned, looks like we're back in business."

If I had to choose one emotion that overpowered the rest, I would have to go with grief and its complex response to loss.

In a matter of minutes, while sitting there with Aaron in that car, I experienced every conceivable outdated stage of grief ranging from shock ("Why me? My entire life is a joke. I can't believe this is happening."), to emotional release ("Got all the crying and screaming out. Now I can deal with the problem. Feeling better, not so upset anymore. Breathe deep, calming breaths. Relax and go with the flow. Why don't I meditate..."), to panic ("I don't know how to meditate! Why didn't I ever learn to meditate? My heart is going to explode! My head is going to pop! I have to piss!"), to deep seeded pangs of guilt ("It's always my fault. What kind of life am I going to be able to provide for Aaron? How could I have brought him into such a world?"), to

hostility (“It’s all HIS fault! HE is the one who put us in this situation. If HE was here right now, I would choke the living shit out of HIM.”), and, finally, to misguided hope (“Maybe the car will start...”).

*Funny, but there was definitely something strange going on that night...
I just couldn’t put my thumb on what.*

With the car in gear, Beatrice stepped on the gas.

The car lurched and then rolled forward. Slowly, it built speed. The fragile body shimmied and shook as it increased speed. *This is going to work*, Beatrice thought to herself once the car reached the 35mph speed limit through that section of the highway. Everything was going good. Nothing was in their way – just blocks of open road.

That is...

until the stoplight.

It suddenly changed from green to yellow.

“No no no,” Beatrice moaned. Instinctively, she stepped on the brake. The car’s engine sputtered, coughed, and revved down as if wanting to die. She quickly released the brake. Her hands tightened on the steering wheel.

Just a few seconds... please, just a few more seconds...

No one was around – the street was empty.

The light turned red.

“Oh no, I have to go through this light.” Beatrice warned Aaron.

“Please,” Aaron laughed.

I, Shakespeare Williams, stepped into the street.

The car sailed through the intersection...

I turned, headlights blinding me...

Beatrice gasped and turned the wheel to the right...

too little, too late...

Aaron clapped his hands in delight...

the right front bumper clipped my hip...

and sent me flying into the great big blue yonder...

End of episode 3

Episode 4: Eaten to Death with a Rust

In less than a blink of an eye, I found myself lying on my back in the center of the highway, staring up at the sky. Stars of every size, color, and age shined down on my spread-eagle form. The massive, luminous balls of plasma that formed the constellations twinkled seductively – each competing for my attention.

“They DO look like little diamonds in the sky,” I muttered.

Though the tune of “Twinkle Twinkle Little Star” originated in Paris, France in 1761 (with many mistakenly claiming that Mozart created the original melody with his variations on “Ah vous dirais-je, Maman”), the lyrics did not exist until Jane Taylor wrote them in 1806. The original children’s poem was titled “The Star,” and consisted of four lines and five stanzas. Much different from the rhyming six-lined “song” we recite today.

From my vantage point on the warm asphalt, I could name about 30 of the 88 constellations hovering above me. There was Hydra, Virgo, Ursa Major, Cetus, Hercules, Eridanus, Pegasus, Draco... Draco, Latin for dragon, one of the 48 constellations listed by the 2nd century astronomer Ptolemy. The brightest star in the Draco constellation is Gamma Draconis. Within the constellation is the Cat’s Eye Nebula, which resembles a blue disk.... Draco is often described as having a whitish complexion, with straight platinum hair, cold gray eyes...

Then it hit me: I haven’t seen the latest Harry Potter movie.

Draco Malfoy, a fictional character and an adversary to Harry Potter in the popular books written by J. K. Rowling.

Suddenly, a woman's high-pitched voice broke the tranquility of the night:

“OH MY FUCKING GOD. I HIT A MAN!”

The sound on a car door opening and slamming shut followed. I turned and looked toward the commotion, only to have two bright stars shining directly in my eyes. The darkened silhouette of a woman blocked one of the stars as she came running toward my outstretched body.

“Is he dead?” A little boy yelled from the car.

“Stay in the car Aaron...” she yelled back to the child. When she reached me, Beatrice fell to her knees beside me. She shook with fright and her eyes were the size of silver dollars. The look of horror on her face was priceless. “I am so sorry,” she apologized. “I didn't see you. Are you all right? You came out of nowhere and I didn't have time to stop. Are you hurt? Are you in pain?”

Pain?

I rolled my eyes at this foolish woman.

Of course I was in pain...

my entire life was nothing but pain.

Yeah, sure, my left hip hurt from where the rusted-out Pacer's front bumper hit me, but I wasn't in pain per-say. Pain is something all antichrists know – whether it's somatic, visceral, or neuropathic.

We thrive for pain; we grow and learn from our pain.

Simply put, by being this generation's antichrist, I understood perfectly what the “true” feeling of pain felt like.

“Can you hear me? Can you talk? Should I call an ambulance?” Beatrice fired off the questions one after the other, never pausing for an answer.

“Mom,” the boy called out again, “Did you kill him?”

“Aaron, please,” she snapped. She leaned closer, inches from my face, and spoke in a loud enunciated voice: “ARE YOU HURT?”

“Fine,” I mumbled, “but... but...”

“But what?”

“Could you back off just a little?”

“Are you finding it hard to breath?”

“No... no... but... you seriously... and I mean seriously... need a breath mint or something.”

Stunned, she moved away. “Ooookkkkkaaayyyy, now that we’ve established that you can talk and that you’re an ass, are you hurt?”

“Mooooooooommmmm,” Aaron interrupted again, louder this time, “Are you sure he’s not dead?”

I sat up quickly and yelled back: “No, I’m not dead!”

The rapid movement to a sitting position abruptly caused the Earth to shift off its axis. My vision blurred and everything spun wobbly. Even though I was sitting on the highway, it felt as if I was falling from a tall object. Nausea filled my stomach and the light-headedness increased.

Head rush, I calmly explained to myself.

I closed my eyes and laid my head in my gloved hands. The leather felt hot against my forehead.

“What’s wrong now?” Beatrice asked, a new mask of fear covering her face. “Are you going to pass out?”

“No, no,” I said, trying to regain my composure, “Just sat up to quick. I’ll be fine in just a minute... There, starting to feel better already.” I opened my eyes, feeling a little better. “Who’s that annoyance in the car?”

“That’s Aaron, my son. I’m Beatrice, by the way.”

“Would rather have met you under better circumstances, but pleased to meet you Beatrice. My name’s Shakespeare.”

“Shakespeare? As in William Shakespeare, the playwright?”

“No, as in William Shakespeare, Jr., the world renowned King of fishing rods and

tackle...”

It was true... I was named after none other than William Shakespeare, Jr., creator of the level-wind fishing reel.

In 1896, William Shakespeare’s first patent was for the level wind reel (a mechanism for spreading fishing line evenly back on to the spool). All it took was this one groundbreaking creation to place Mr. Shakespeare in the annals of history. From there, after opening the William Shakespeare Company in Kalamazoo Michigan, there was no stopping him. He went on to create an entire line of fishing products that, even today, fishermen swear by.

Just like Mr. Shakespeare, my father was an avid fisherman. Ever opportunity he had, he could be found at the nearest fish-filled body of water with a line in. Because he valued this hobby more than anything in the world, he believed in buying only the best products (which always carried the Shakespeare Company symbol), even if it meant that our small family had to go without. There were many times that my mother and I went hungry just so he could have the latest rod, the most outrageous lures.

When I was born, my father took one look at me and proclaimed without hesitation: “We are going to call him Shakespeare.”

Puzzled, my mother asked why.

“Well, just look at him. He’s built like a watch.”

This didn’t make sense... unless you knew my father.

“Built like a watch” was the Shakespeare Company’s slogan.

“Well, that’s interesting,” Beatrice said after a long pause. “Anyway, back to the situation at hand. Do you want to go to the hospital or...”

“No,” I cut her off immediately. “I’m fine now. It was just a little bump, a little flying through the air... No harm done.”

Beatrice laughed. “It was almost like you were almost eaten to death with a rust.”

“What?”

“Shakespeare.”

“Yes?”

“No, ‘eaten to death with a rust’ is a partial line from Shakespeare’s King Henry IV.”

“If you don’t mind me saying, but that’s a rather obscure reference to be quoting after hitting someone with your car.”

Beatrice shrugged. “That’s what you get when you’re an unemployed Literature major. In any case, maybe I can give you a lift home. It’s the least we can do after almost killing you. The car is rather loaded with our belongings but I’m sure we can fit you in.”

I thought it over for a moment, weighing the pros and cons of the situation. Part of me wanted to just go home alone and revel in the glory of the start of Armageddon; whereas the pro side kept telling me that Moirae, the Goddess of Fate, brought this woman into my life for a reason.

Not one to go against Moirae, I decided to take her up on the offer.

“It’s a deal,” I said. “Give me a hand up and let’s go.”

I held out my gloved hands...

Beatrice gripped my hands and tugged...

the sweat the covered my hands made the leather gloves slip...

I started to rise off the ground...

Beatrice pulled harder, grunting with exertion...

then, without warning, both gloves popped off my hands...

Revealing my thumbless hands.

Weeks after gaining my full trust, the Frenchman led me out into the woods. We walked for hours, chatting pleasantly about all the good I would bring to the world once I accepted the role of antichrist, before we arrived at a natural clearing. In the center of this clearing was an ancient stump that was about chest high to my five year old height.

“Please lay your hands, with your fingers outstretched, on the stump,” he directed me.

I did as I was told.

He then begun reciting something in a language that I did not recognize. The sky darkened, and the wind begun blowing. As his voice rose, growing louder and thundering in my head, two small hatchets appeared in his hands. He held them up to the sky.

Lightning crashed...

the daytime sky turned completely black...

other unseen voices chanted around us...

he turned his attention back to me, smiled, and then brought both axes down as hard as he could...

severing the thumbs from my hands.

See... told you I know a lot about pain.

End of Episode 4

Episode 5: **Prodigious Birth**

Sitting at the kitchen table in my two bedroom apartment, Beatrice and I were drinking a couple of beers and talking like old friends while Aaron entertained himself in the living room, basically ignoring the adults. We chatted about everything, ranging from how sorry they were about hitting me with their rusted out car to the current state of the world. I played the game well during this time. Not once did I let on that I was the antichrist. This is not information easily volunteered to strangers – most of all to a woman with a small child, a small child who would most likely never see adulthood because of the approaching war of Armageddon.

When those gloves came off Shakespeare's hands, I about started my period! I didn't mean to scream, but the sudden realization that someone only had eight fingers was quite a shocking experience. Usually I'm only startled (ok, the right word would be frightened) by rodents and clowns; however, seeing Shakespeare scramble to his feet in a panic and snatching the gloves away only added to the tension. He never offered an explanation concerning his condition. He just took those gloves and quickly placed them back on his hands, using only his fore and middle fingers to pull them on. Once they were securely in place, he forced a smile and suggested that we should be going.

I honestly didn't know what to think.

What had caused such a thing? Was it genetic? Maybe a tragic farming accident, since this is Illinois?

Thousands of questions swirled in my head, questions that I knew I didn't have a right to ask until I either knew him better or he offered an explanation.

Truth be known, we all have our secrets – no matter how big or small.

Beatrice took a long swig off a beer. “You know Shakespeare, Aaron and I have been trying so hard for so long that I really don’t know how much more I can take. For the last three years we have done nothing but struggle to make ends meet. Like tonight... first the car stalled, and then we hit you...”

“Where were you headed, if I may ask?”

She paused for a very long time. Mixed emotions flashed across her face. Before speaking, she lifted the half-full beer and downed the entire contents. A very mild form of liquid courage, one could say.

“Honestly, and I’m not proud to admit this but... we really didn’t have any destination planned. We were driving around and looking for a safe place to park for the night.”

“You’re homeless?”

“Basically,” she sighed. “We moved out of our apartment today. Had to, I guess. I was two months behind in rent and the landlord kept threatening me. So, this morning we loaded up the car and hit the open road with a rusted-out car that was about to die at any second. Which, knowing our luck, it did while we were searching for a well-lit parking lot to sleep in. And, to top off the story, once it started running again –”

“You were going to sleep in a parking lot?” I cut her off, shocked. “That doesn’t sound very safe to me. What about your ex-husband or parents? Couldn’t you stay with either of them?”

Beatrice rolled her eyes. “We haven’t seen Roger, the Ex, in years. Don’t know what happened to him. He just vanished off the face of the earth. Most likely he went back to France... As for my parents... well, both died in a car accident about a year ago. Drunk driver hit them and they were killed instantly.” She paused and fought back tears. Instantly, I retrieved another beer for her. After taking another long swallow, she continued: “Since then we’ve been trying our best to survive without help from anyone. You know Shakespeare, we’ve been under such a dark cloud for so long that I don’t remember the last time I was actually happy.”

“Sorry to hear that,” I said, and meant it.

Hey even the antichrist has feelings!

She shrugged and took another pull off the beer. “What are you going to do? Things definitely can’t get any worse. As long as I have Aaron...”

At hearing his name, Aaron stepped silently in to the kitchen. He yawned and leaned against his mother. “Mom,” he said in a timid voice, “I’m tired. Aren’t you tired?”

Beatrice put her arm around him and held him close. I sat watching them – the unconditional love between mother and son tugged at my heart. Usually not one for sentimentality, I did feel sorry for them. Beatrice seemed like such a kind, hardworking woman and Aaron the perfect child.

They appeared to be the family that I had always dreamed of.

“Am soooooo tired,” Aaron moaned.

This time Beatrice yawned. “Yeah, I’m getting rather sleepy myself. Well, Shakespeare, I guess it’s time for us to hit the road.”

“I don’t think so...”

“What do you mean?”

“Honestly, you’ve been drinking and I can’t let you leave because of that. Don’t need you out there hitting anyone else tonight. Besides, I have a spare room that you can use for as long as you like.”

The invitation left my mouth before I could stop it. Such a statement was very uncharacteristic coming from me, being the antichrist and hater of the thumbed tribe. I should have just put them back out on the street and let someone else worry about them. This was none of my concern.

Besides, in just a matter of time, they would both be dead and forgotten once Armageddon started.

But... and there’s always that psychological “but” that seems to enter into every equation... even though I’d just met them, I felt close to Beatrice. She was the sister I always wanted. We were the exact same age, our birthday’s only months apart, and it almost felt as if we’ve known each other for years.

Besides, in the long run, I did need a Queen to help me rule the world once I took over.

“Please mommy.”

“No, no,” Beatrice stood, “We can’t impose on you. Hell, we almost killed you tonight. No, we’ll go back to the car –“

“Nonsense! Both of you will stay here tonight. Hey, it’s the least you could do after your attempt to kill me. In the morning, once all of us are thinking clearly, we can then figure out what needs to be done.”

“Please, mommy...” Aaron begged.

Beatrice looked down into her son’s pleading eyes. She honestly didn’t have a choice. Neither I nor Aaron was going to let her leave that night.

“Fine,” she said defeated, but relieved that they didn’t have to sleep in the car. “But just for tonight.

“Great! Here, let me show you the room.”

After falling asleep, I was woken by a light tapping on my shoulder.

When I opened my eyes, I saw Aaron standing at the side of the bed.

“What?” I asked, sitting up, “Something wrong?”

He nodded. “Most definitely... we need to talk Shakespeare.”

“I’m sure we can discuss this in the morning. Besides, you really shouldn’t enter someone’s bedroom without being announced first. Hasn’t your mother taught you any manners?”

He groaned and rolled his eyes. “Get a clue Shakespeare... she’s not my mother.”

Now it was my turn to be stunned. For hours I had heard about his birth, his growth. Could all of that have been a lie? Maybe Beatrice kidnapped him? Stranger things have happened in this messed up world. They **were** complete strangers to me. Who knew what secrets they hid from the world?

“Yo, Shakespeare, come back to earth.” Aaron snapped his fingers impatiently in front of my face. “If you want the truth, just look into my eyes and all will be explained.”

Playing his game, I leaned over and peered into his baby blue eyes.

Almost instantly, a black vortex appeared and sucked me into another world.

I flew past lost souls living in limbo...
the sorrowful cries of the damned and the sound of
gnashing of teeth filled my ears...
I hovered above burning pits of fire and brimstone...
hideously
deformed creatures sprang from the fire and bowed down before me...

Then it hit me: This child was Beelzebub – who I knew more intimately as Roger, the Frenchman from my past.

Instantly, I was back in the room.

I pulled back, startled and a little afraid. “What the hell is going on here? Does Beatrice know?”

“You’ve got to be joking,” he laughed. “She was only a vessel for my birth.”

Suddenly, I realized the truth to all of Beatrice’s problems. It was all because of Aaron – or should I say Roger, or Beelzebub, or whatever name he was currently using. His darkness was causing all of Beatrice’s problems. It didn’t matter how hard she tried but, until Aaron was out of her life, she would have nothing but bad luck.

For the first time in my life, I actually disliked MY spiritual father.

“You really are a piece of work,” I told him. “For doing this to such a kind woman, I should strangle you to death and end all of her problems.”

Aaron burst out laughing, laughing in a deep demonic voice. “But Shakespeare, you can’t... you don’t have any thumbs.”

End of Episode 5

Episode 6: **Rounded With a Sleep**

Flashback

From another perspective:

“It was very nice of Shakespeare to let us spend the night,” Beatrice said with a yawn. She lay in the queen sized bed in the guestroom with Aaron tucked snuggly in her arms. “You know, especially after we almost killed him.”

Aaron didn’t respond. He squirmed from his mother’s arms, claimed his side of the bed, and instantly fell asleep.

Faker!

Ruler of Deception!

Oh, how easy it is to fool the willing.

As you lay there, imitating sleep, you used your unholy powers on Beatrice... casting ancient spells of sleep on your own mother.

You called upon Nyx, the goddess of the night and the mother of Hypnos and Thánatos to aid in the torture of the mortal who gave you life. Nyx appeared in your eye’s mind, shimmering in all her beauty, and started chanting the ancient Greek spell of sleep:

“Κατάσταση νάρκης τώρα. Χρόνος έχει ακόμα. θα κυμανθεί μεταξύ των συνθηκών διαβίωσης και των νεκρών, επιτρέποντας σκοτάδι για να απόχρωση του φωτός. Κατάσταση νάρκης τώρα. Το πνεύμα των ονείρων θα ισχυρίζονται ψυχή σας - όραμα σκοτάδι, καθίσταται μαύρη! Κατάσταση νάρκης τώρα ... ύπνου τώρα ...”

“Good night, my little prince.” Beatrice said with a gently kiss to the back of Aaron’s head.

She couldn't explain it but, after years of feeling on edge and ready to snap emotionally, things FELT good on that mid-summer's night. Even the earlier "accident" seemed RIGHT – almost as if she was destined to meet me (oh, how foolish opposable thumbed mortals can be). The night's conversation flowed easily, like two long lost friends or even a brother and sister meeting after a period of time... catching up, talking over each other but never missing a word from the other.

Almost like a real family.

She felt safe and secure... feelings she hadn't felt in such a very very long time.

She smiled at the white plastered ceiling, and gave a callout to God (just in case HE did exist): "Thank you God... thank you for bringing Shakespeare into our life."

And, with that, she laid her head on the soft goose down pillow and instantly fell into a deep sleep.

Within seconds, she started to dream...

Dreams: a sequence of usually nonsensical movies that play through someone's subconscious during sleep. Though no one can actually explain why we dream or what their interpretations could mean, philosophers and psychiatrists have speculated on this topic throughout all of recorded history.

Many wise – and not so wise – men have sought the meaning of dreams. Some have described them as nothing more than a physiological cleansing of our daily subconscious; while others believe that dreams are actually messages from the Gods and Goddess of old, and possible predictions of the future.

Beatrice dreamed that she was on a large lake, at sunset, in a small aluminum V hull boat, dressed as a well-to-do woman of the sixteenth century. Her hair was parted in the center, fluffed around the temples, with most of it pinned under a caul of silk lined net-working. Even though she stood in the boat, she wore a loose sky-blue gown of light-weight silk over a bodice and skirt that had an open-necked partlet, showcasing her ample breasts.

In her hands, she held a Shakespeare crafted two-piece medium fishing rod with a stainless steel spinning reel. The 10-pound line pulled, alerting her that a fish had taken the bait.

She jerked the rod back, securing the catch on the hook, and started reeling it in. The rod bent, she pulled harder, reeled faster... until, out of the calm blue of the lake, a cigarette – a Virginia Slims in fact – popped from the water and landed in the boat.

“Now, isn’t that strange,” she said, confused.

She took the cigarette off the hook, stuck it in a hidden pocket in her dress (you never know when a cigarette could come in handy), baited the hook with another worm, and tossed the line back out.

Within seconds, she had another bite... and, once reeled in, discovered that it was yet another cigarette.

“This isn’t fair,” she spoke aloud; “I don’t smoke anymore. This is just an unjust tease – a nasty trick to get me to smoke again. I won’t do it! Do you hear me? I will not place this cigarette between my lips, light it, and slowly inhale that sweet calming smoke deep into my lungs. I promised Aaron that I would quit! Nothing you can do will ever get me to smoke again.”

Suddenly, thousands of cigarettes started leaping out of the lake and into the boat. Beatrice swatted at them, trying to knock them back into the water, but there were too many. The boat began to fill... first covering the bottom, then her feet, more and more hurling themselves into the boat, reaching her knees, her thighs...

Beatrice screamed in sheer frustration.

Needing to escape the temptation,

she closed her eyes

and jumped into the lake...

“You must be commended for your strength, Beatrice.” A strange man’s voice echoed all around her, as though pumped through a Dolby digital surround sound system. “The temptation was a test, and you’ve proven yourself –”

“A fucking test,” Beatrice snapped. She opened her eyes and discovered that she was floating, naked, in a bright whiteness of nothingness. Her head hurt, and the desire – no, the NEED – for a cigarette was unbelievable. This definitely was not the time to fuck with her. “How dare you fuck with me like that? Who the fuck is this anyway? This better not be some kind of fucked up version of Punked.”

“I am your creator, Beatrice. For such an inferior specimen, I’m ebullient to perceive that

you are so stimulated with our situation. And, judging from your appearance and your subconscious mentality, I understand that you only possess twenty-three criticisms that could possibly sabotage our project. But, in this endless dribble known as the quintessence of existence, you will be flawless in our inevitable endeavor."

"Only twenty-three criticisms," she laughed bitterly. "Excuse me, but is this some kind of acid flashback? You know, I did experiment quite a bit while in collage."

"No, you are not experiencing a narcotic induced invasion. I am authentic, you are substantial, and the arena known as the Zone is genuine. Do you have any idea why you've been summoned? No, I guess a mere mortal like you would not. Let me acknowledge my own rhetorical question with an abstract answer... I thought it would be pleasurable to address the individual who will improve our justification in the approaching epoch."

"What the fuck are you talking about? Maybe you're the one having the flashback."

"Please, listen closely, our interval is concluding faster than I anticipated. THEY feel something is not correct in the time/space continuum and are approaching. There is an abundance of cultivation that needs to be completed before we can continue. Time is all we desire, but it is our primary shortcoming. You must understand this – THEY have started the war ahead of schedule. It is now necessary to hasten the procedure of your spiritual creation as quickly as possible... THEY approach... Beatrice, it was an honor and a privilege to meet you. We will congregate again in the near future."

"Wait one damn minute," she demanded, "I want some answers. You can't leave me hanging like this. What the fuck do you mean by the procedure of my spiritual creation? I'm a fucking atheist, if it's any concern of yours."

"There is not enough time to illuminate acceptably. The only explanation I can convey is that in the forbidding future, you will become a principle contender in the deliverance of mankind. You will be my player in the Game. You, Beatrice, will be the savior of the human race. That is, unless you turn against us. If this tragedy occurs, THEY will prevail and rule the Earth and all the Zones. Terror will rule all of mankind because of your incompetence... You must now wake... THEY have arrived..."

Beatrice's eyes snapped open.

She sat up in bed, her heart thundering in her chest.

The bedroom door opened slowly,

creaking ominously...

revealing

Shakespeare and Aaron.

End of Episode 6

Episode 7: **Each Playing Many Parts**

Beatrice quickly sat up in bed, her face masked with fear and confusion; Aaron took one step into the room, concerned and prepared to do whatever needed to be done to prevent Armageddon from ending before it begun; and I, Shakespeare, began mentally questioning everything that had transpired over the last few hours.

Something didn't make sense...

**The pieces
DIDN'T
quite fit.**

Why did Beatrice hit me with the car if Aaron was actually my "father?" Shouldn't he have tried to prevent me from almost being killed? And, when I was lying on the ground, why was he so insistent in finding out if I was dead? Why was he even on Earth, contacting me? Why was he changing the plans?

Why... why... why...

And then there was Beatrice. How did Beatrice, someone who appeared so sweet and kind, fit into the Armageddon plan? How did I know what was happening inside the car, moments before they hit me? How could I have known her thoughts during that time? How could I have known that "someone" contacted her through a dream of temptation and warned her about Aaron and myself?

How... how... how...

Who is telling this story?

I thought I was – me, Shakespeare Williams, recounting the beginning of the end for all the members of the opposable thumb tribe... but, someone else has interrupted MY story several times and provided information that I could not know. An omnipresent narrator has high-jacked the story several times, leaving me on the sideline like a secondary character.

I do not appreciate this!

How many of “us” are there wanting to tell this story?

And, most important, which one of us is telling the truth... and who is playing what part?

“Is everything alright, mommy?” Aaron asked.

Beatrice brought her hand up to brush the hair from her face but stopped in mid-movement, her hand frozen inches from her face. She stared in horror at the Virginia Slims cigarette held between her index and middle fingers. She shrieked, tossed the cigarette across the room, jumped out of bed, and moved as close to the distant wall as she could get – providing plenty of open space between all of us.

When she spoke, her voice shook nervously: “What the fuck is going on here?”

“What do you mean, mommy?” Aaron answered, moving closer. “You must of had a bad dream... you know mommy, maybe you’re still dreaming?”

“I’m not dreaming Aaron,” she snapped. “I don’t wake up from dreams holding cigarettes in my hand. Now, someone better tell me what’s going on here.”

“I agree,” I added from the hallway. “I want to know the answer to that question too.”

Aaron turned toward me, anger clouding his angelic face, “Don’t YOU start with me, Shakespeare. It’s bad enough that I have to deal with this irrational mortal woman and –“

“Irrational mortal woman,” Beatrice repeated. She slid down the wall to a sitting position, her arms crossed in a personally protective gesture. “I’m your mother, Aaron, not an irrational mortal woman.”

“I agree with Beatrice, don’t refer to your mother as an irrational mortal woman.”

“That’s it!” Aaron screamed in a deep, testicle dropping voice. “Everyone just calm the fuck down!”

“Don’t you talk like that,” Beatrice warned.

“Enough with the mortal – SLEEP!”

Beatrice’s eyes closed, her head dropped to her chest and she started to snore – instantly in a deep dark dreamless sleep.

“You shouldn’t do that to your mother.” I reprimanded the child.

“Shakespeare, what’s your problem?” Aaron marched up to me and placed his hands on his hips. Rage burned within his eyes. “You’re acting like such a goody-two-shoes. Where are your balls, man? Were they cut off at the same time **they**... I mean, I... cut off your thumbs?”

Time stood still...

pieces clicked, began to fit...

information started becoming clearer...

verbal gaffes made sense...

some questions became clearer...

This child was not Beelzebub, my father – he was my brother!

“It all makes sense now, Aaron.” I told him, my anger started to rise. “If you weren’t 5 years old, oh the horrendous things I would do to you.”

“What you talkin ‘bout Shakespeare?”

I kneeled down so we could be eye to eye. “You know exactly what I’m talking about, Aaron. Don’t play me as a fool. I have you figured out like yesterday’s news. It just took me a little while to fit the pieces together but, after your little verbal mistake...”

“You’re talking insane, Shakespeare,” he stuttered. I could see it in his face, he was becoming nervous. “Maybe you should go to sleep too? You’re not thinking right.”

I laughed in his face. “Your little parlor tricks won’t work on me, little one. So, before this gets really ugly, I suggest you come clean right now.”

He fidgeted... he started to shake... tears rimmed his eyes...

“Oh knock it off,” I snapped. “That might work on Beatrice, but not on me. Here, let me start for you... I know all about what happened in the car tonight. You wanted Beatrice to hit me. That was all part of your plan, wasn’t it? See, you can’t kill me... it goes against the rules. But, if

a mortal did it, well, I'd just be another antichrist statistic taken out before his time. With me out of the way, you ambitious little fuck, you could then take my place without any problems whatsoever.”

He sniveled. “I didn't want to hurt you, Shakespeare.”

“Bullshit! For some unknown reason you wanted me out of the picture. Now, the big question is – WHY?”

A heavy silence filled the air between us. Our eyes locked. His tears vanished and I could tell that he was getting a grip on himself. He changed – not physically – but I could see the projection of an innocent 5 year old boy vanish. In his place was another person, someone like me – another antichrist filled with all the knowledge of our ancestors.

“Ok, let's play this your way,” he said with a smile. “You want the truth... well, you can't handle the truth! Shakespeare, you've become weak in this world. Father needs someone who is going to do the right thing, at the right moment, without hesitation or emotion. You've become one of THEM. Just like that little phone call tonight. What do you think that was going to accomplish? Well, let me tell you brother – it accomplished nothing! Oh sure, you pissed off the other side but that was about it. See, while you're playing all of your little emotional games the other side is using your weaknesses in **THEIR** favor. They know how to push your buttons, how to get a reaction out of you... **You've become THEIR puppet.**”

Fury like I had never felt flooded through me. “How dare you say such a thing? I'm loyal to our cause! My duty is to bring about the destruction of the human race and nothing or no one is going to stop me.”

“Then we have a little problem here, don't we. You spit out words like loyalty and duty, but you continue to 'sleep' with the enemy.”

This last statement hit me like a slap across the face. He was right. I was sleeping with the enemy. While I thought I was only getting closer to Shepherd to gain information and confidence, I was actually falling in love with him. That was the real explanation concerning the telephone call I made earlier. I wasn't starting Armageddon... I was pissed off because I thought he was cheating on me with someone else. It had nothing to do

with the war. Aaron was right – I had lost sight of my goal because of this fucked up emotion called love.

“What’s wrong Shakespeare? Cat suddenly got your tongue?” He laughed and stepped right up to me with all the confidence in the world. “You, my brother, are nothing more than a blot on our cause. You are a liability... a liability that needs to be taken out... if you get what I mean.”

I stood up, my head spinning. This wasn’t how it was suppose to go down. I had experienced far too much torture and pain to lose it all because of my emotions. I stepped back, needing to get away from the horrendous replacement standing before me.

My body started to shake...

black dots flashed before my eyes...

my heart thudded against my chest like a jackhammer...

tears filled my eyes...

I moaned, cried, shrieked like a baby...

and, just when I didn’t think it could get any worse,

I passed out...

End of Episode 7

Episode 8: **There Is No Evil Angel But Love**

Through the darkness, I saw his face... it was Shepherd.

Ten years older than me, in his mid-thirties, with streaks of gray running through his shoulder length jet-black hair. He stared at me with piercing black eyes, eyes that could see past the outward façade of my mask and deeply into my soul. His wrinkle free skin, darkly tanned; his nose and lips, perfectly formed. Even in the most trying of times, he radiated calmness and security.

He was faultless in every aspect.

No doubt about it, Shepherd was an angel...

and my immortal enemy.

We met about a year ago.

I was standing on the corner of Thirty-third and Third Street in downtown Potter's Field, minding my own business, when this stranger approached me. He wore a basic black trench coat over a nondescript black suit, shirt and tie. He stopped directly in front of me, a darkly dressed seraph, and smiled.

"Excuse me," he said in a calm, controlled, soothing voice. "Would you happen to be Shakespeare Williams?"

"That could be me." I mumbled, not one who enjoyed associating with any member of the opposable thumb tribe. I attempted to walk around him, but he moved with me... never once taking his eyes off me. Extremely uncomfortable, anger built up inside me. "Do you mind? I'm in a hurry and don't have time for this bullshit."

He laughed, and our eyes locked.

The windows to the soul opened and, without needing to say another word, I knew exactly who, and what, he was.

“Shit, you found me...” was all I could say.

“Shakespeare,” Shepherd’s voice drifted softly through the darkness, “This is not the time for sleeping or walking down memory lane. You need to open your eyes and deal with the present situation before it’s too late.”

A quote by Sun Tzu, a 6th century Chinese military strategist and author of *The Art of War*, drifted through my brain:

“It is said that if you know your enemies and know yourself, you will not be imperiled in a hundred battles; if you do not know your enemies but do know yourself, you will win one and lose one; if you do not know your enemies nor yourself, you will be imperiled in every single battle.”

With this knowledge, I knew what was required of me... I had to make Shepherd – my known enemy – my closest ally and dearest friend. No matter what I needed to do, no matter what feelings required overcoming or actions taken, Shepherd had to be part of my life.

I swear I was only doing what was essential for my survival.

I was keeping my friends close and my enemies even closer.

Love,

unfortunately,

was an emotion that I never dreamed would be part of the equation.

“So tell me,” Shepherd said one night, “Why did they take your thumbs?”

I rolled over and turned away from him. This was a subject I didn't like talking about. It was a personal experience, a religious experience shared between me and my Father. After several minutes of silence, once I formulated the perfect politically correct argument, I answered. "It was an offering... kind of the way your God commanded Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac."

"But God did not allow Abraham to sacrifice his son. At the last minute, an angel came and provided a ram for the sacrifice. It was all a test of faith, to see if Abraham would do what was right... nothing more. It was purely symbolic."

I faced him. "And this only proves your God's weakness. Sometimes, actions speak louder than words."

We fell silent, each thinking of our religious indoctrination – his for good, mine for pure evil. We were as different as night and day... but our common ground was the twilight. It's within those shades of gray that every person, whether good or bad, must exist in if they intend to survive humanity's reality.

After a while, he asked: "Have you ever doubted Him?"

I raised my head and laughed, "Never... just as you've never doubted your God."

"Listen to me, Shakespeare," Shepherd's voice continued, "You need to stop with this silliness and wake up. This is neither the time nor the place... Come back... the twilight has been triumphed and total darkness created... You have to prevail... you have to wake up."

But, I lied.

There was one point in my life that I did have reservations.

I was about 13, it was on September 11th, and the buildings fell.

In a cloud of smoke and dust, they crumbled to the ground. There wasn't anything that could be done to stop it. People ran down the street in a panic, clouds of smoke and rubble chasing behind them, and the television cameras were locked on the sight.

Horror and tragedy, trapped eternally on film.

Before the buildings hit the ground, the rewind button was pressed and I watched them resurrect themselves. My heart was breaking, but I was told I needed to watch it again – in slow motion this time. My Father truly believed I needed to see such destruction... but slower this time. I needed to see every millisecond of horror that transpired earlier that day.

At the beginning of the video, the entire nightmare started again. HE played the tape in slow motion, showing the horrendous moments contained within each frame of the video.

“Look at this,” he said with an excited smile, “You can actually see people jumping from the top floors.”

I turned toward him, actually horrified at these words.

Having been raised on the horrors of history, I didn't think anything could shock me. I have seen documentaries concerning the atrocities of war and read countless books about what the soulless can do to his fellow man... Hell, I had even suffered through the mutilation of my own body in the name of my Father... but... but this was different. This incident was happening NOW – in so-called real time. How could someone view such material as if they were only watching a horror movie? Didn't HE realize that those were real people leaping for their lives, only to find the sweet comfort of death at the end of their plunge? This wasn't special effects – this was reality, plain and simple.

This was what I was CREATED for – destruction on a global level.

My heart broke,
shattered...

and I doubted.

Maybe Aaron was right? Maybe I wasn't suited for this job? There was this little piece of humanity still within me... a little piece that even HE couldn't take away. I wondered about the others. Did they also suffer from this same dilemma? Was that why all the other antichrists before me failed? Did we, as humans (with or without thumbs), always possess that one aspect within our soul that made us strive for the survival of humanity... was that what LOVE really meant? All of us were created to suffer, to show our beliefs in different behaviors and customs... From Buddhists, to Christians, to Muslims, to Jews, to Satanists... don't we all strive for the preservation of our beliefs?

To overcome?

To survive?

Maybe Aaron was a new breed, the next generation, a combination of all the previous antichrists? Maybe Aaron was nothing more than a totally heartless being... one without a soul or without a conscience.

Maybe he was the TRUE antichrist? A perfect being of destruction designed for only one purpose – the complete annihilation of humanity.

Maybe...

***“Shakespeare,” Shepherd shouted, “WAKE THE
FUCK UP, NOW!”***

My eyes snapped open.

Beatrice straddled my midsection. Her eyes completely white, having rolled into the back of her head. On her face was a frozen expression of pure hatred.

Above her head she held, in both hands, a large butcher’s knife...

“Do it,” Aaron ordered...

and, before I could react,

Beatrice brought the knife down...

End of Episode 8

Episode 9: **What Fools These Mortals Be!**

As the knife came down, the most typical and common thing happened to me – my horror filled tragic life started to pass right before my eyes.

I saw it all...

I saw myself laying in a cradle, staring up at the sad, confused faces of my mom, dad, aunt, and uncle (who just so happened to be all the same – but that’s another twisted story... here, let me break it down in mathematical terms: sister + brother = aunt and uncle); to all of the sexual, mental and physical abuse that all antichrist’s suffer if they want to be any good at their job; to Roger, the Frenchman, aka Beelzebub, cutting off my thumbs; to learning how to manipulate everyone in any way I could to reach a goal or desire (I discovered at such an early age that sex could be a great motivator for some people – no matter if it was male or female, or underage and secret... you always get what’s wanted in the end)...

The knife came down closer... watching as if in slow motion....

...to teenage drug usage (ranging from the general smoking of marijuana to the experimentation of acid in blotter, pill, and liquid form) and alcohol consumption in all manners and forms; to moving out of my parents house at seventeen when they accidentally – with a little help from me – fell into a running combine and were quickly made into instant fertilizer for the fields; to getting my current apartment in Potter’s Field... which led to more drug and alcohol abuse, the collecting of state welfare checks so I didn’t have to work (plus, I also received a nice sum of money from the sale of the family farm and my parent’s life insurance after their tragic accident... which also prompted the entire city of Potter’s Field to hold several charitable activities to collect monetary donations for the “poor” orphan)...

Closer, light glinted off the very sharp blade... Aaron clapped in enjoyment... Beatrice still lost in a satanic trance...

... to learning more and more about the reality and horrors of the world around me... wars, genocides, unsolicited murders, terrorists, etc. etc.; to watching reruns of Mister Rogers' Neighborhood so that I could learn my antichrist abilities from a true master; reading and watching anything and everything I could get my thumbless hands on that concerned how the thumbless tribe enjoyed plotting and exploiting their own destruction – filling notebook after notebook with all the information that I would use during my reign; to watching in complete horror the attack on the Twin Towers in New York City and realizing that reality doesn't always match history, history that has become more of a fantasy than a reality...

The knife was about half-way down, heading directly for the center of my chest...

... to meeting Shepherd and learning all he could teach me – things like kindness, love, understanding... the brighter things in life; to denying my true feelings, wanting to please my one true father, Beelzebub, and not wanting to be a bad son (well, I wanted to be a BAD son, but a bad son in a good way that would make any parent proud of their offspring); to convincing myself that I was only using Shepherd, while falling in love with him... for once learning that sex was more than a tool – it was an emotion, an emotion that could be one of the most powerful feelings anyone ever has to suffer...

Six inches from my chest... the knife coming even closer, gaining speed, with enough force to break through my chest cavity and pierce my blackened heart... Aaron chanting: "Go mommy, go mommy..."

... making the phone call, starting Armageddon, walking back to the apartment, getting hit by the car, inviting Beatrice and Aaron (the little fucker) into my home, to learning the true reason of why they entered my life, to laying on the floor... about to be killed...

Wait one fucking minute!

It was then that I thought that the purpose of seeing one's life pass before their eyes was suppose to relax them before their big death scene... not make them regret their entire life. Hell, after experiencing such an instantaneous rundown of life, I realized that I've lived one totally fucked up life. My life was nothing more then a major downer since the beginning, with little happiness in the middle. Dying would only be a highlight to an otherwise fucked up existence.

Why fight it?

The rational side of my brain said that I should just lay back and let the celestial forces controlling Beatrice have their way and let another antichrist have his day.

Maybe I wasn't cut out for this kind of shit... maybe I should just get a real job like other people... maybe a waiter's job... shit, I think I would need thumbs for that... whatever, maybe I should just become a respectable citizen and start life over, make a new beginning for myself... maybe... maybe...

Maybe I should do something now before this bitch kills me!

With the knife about an inch from my chest, a loud popping sound echoed throughout the room. The knife came to a dead stop, as if it had struck something stronger than metal. The force of this caused the blade to shatter. Pieces flew everywhere and the handle jumped from Beatrice's death grip and landed with a dull thud on the other side of the room.

Her head reared back and she let out a spine chilling moan.

Aaron started cursing like a drunken sailor.

And, before any of us could comprehend what was happening, it was almost as if someone had reached down from the ceiling and grabbed Beatrice by the back of the neck. She lifted off of me, like a rag doll in a giant's hands. Her body went limp and hung suspended motionless in the air about three feet above me.

A feeling of electricity filled the room.

Electrical discharge popped all around us.

And, as if to add more insult to injury, Beatrice urinated.

Luckily, I was quick enough to move out of the way of the stream that ran down her legs.

“What the hell is going on?” Aaron asked, all sweet and innocent again.

I stood up and avoided hitting Beatrice’s limp hovering body as I marched right over to the little fucker who wanted me dead. “I don’t know what to do first... kick your little ass or choke the living shit out of you until you don’t die. Either way, I would feel great doing it.”

“Now what would hurting me accomplish, Shakespeare? You know you can’t kill me, so why go through all the dramatics of the attempt.”

“For the pleasure of watching you struggle for your life.”

Aaron stepped back. “You really are a drama queen.”

“Drama queen! You have the nerve to call me a drama queen after having your mother try to KILL me!”

“Just calm down, ok? We have to figure this out. Something happened just now, something that wasn’t supposed to happen. I admit, yeah, I tried to kill you... but look at the bright side, it didn’t work. Now we need to figure out the ‘why’ of the situation.”

“I don’t believe a word you’re saying. Show me your hands, right now?”

“Whatever for?”

“Because I want to verify that you are an antichrist... I want to see your thumbless hands.”

He hesitated a moment before holding out his hands... which include all of his fingers and both thumbs.

He smiled weakly.

“I knew it! You’re an imposter. This should make killing you even easier.”

“Shakespeare,” nodded disapprovingly, “You’re so old school. Of course I still have my thumbs. After what happened with you – your failure – THEY decided to be less dramatic and take my tonsils instead.”

Now I was REALLY PISSED OFF!

I wanted to scream, to cry, and to murder the little fucker standing in front of me... but knew I couldn’t. I had to pull myself together and figure out what the

fuck was really going on here. Everything was messed up, backwards. All my life I was taught to hate the thumbled tribe and now this new antichrist was being taught to hate the tonsiled tribe?

Tonsils over thumbs?

What sense did that make?

“Ok,” I finally said, “We can deal with this whole trying to kill me thing later. Right now we need to find out why Beatrice couldn’t kill me... and why she’s just hanging there in the air.”

Aaron thought for a moment. Then, he lifted his eyes to the heavens.

“Uuummmm,. Shakespeare, do you think it was... HIM?”

End of Episode 9

Episode 10: **It Makes Gods and Meaner Creatures Kings**

In another dimension, in a timeless void, in a room filled with white celestial clouds, on the Southside of Potter's Field (ok, let's be straight here, in the Projects), the Egyptian God Mother Isis sat on her golden throne dressed in a topless, sheer taffeta red gown with a head dress depicting the moon surround by two horns. As she sat there leisurely on the throne, with one hand on the arm and the other holding a long golden staff with an ankh at the end, she was lost deeply in thought. Many plans had to be made and implemented if the Egyptian "end of the world" was NOT to happen before the Christian predictions DID.

*And let's not even have the Mayans enter these equations yet...
what with their pre-set date of December 21, 2012 for the end of the world.*

Isis blamed Ra, the Sun God and most principal figure in the Egyptian belief system, for her current predicament. Since it was common knowledge that Egyptians believed in the afterlife – thus, there would be a continuation of mankind forever – Ra decided to flex a little masculine muscle by sending out his eye in the form of the goddess Hathor to destroy those who would not worship him as the one and true God.

"Just another man showing off how big his dick is," Isis mumbled under her breath.

Well, to make a long story short, Hathor was only to kill the evil in the world and, being on her period or in some womanly hormonal state, decided to murder as many people as she

could and then frolic in the blood of her victims (something about skin care, which would later be adapted by Countess Elizabeth Báthory – which is an entirely different story and involved only virgins). Anyway, to prevent her from destroying all of humankind, Ra tempted this psycho goddess with a flood of beer that was dyed red, to resemble blood (enticing her bloodlust and, to quench her early stages of alcoholism).

Without a second's hesitation, Hathor swooped down to this lake and drank every last drop of the beer... thus, becoming so drunk that she forgot all about her desire to destroy mankind.

**That was, until about a week ago when she sobered up...
and was really pissed off by the whole deception thing.**

Sitting a couple of steps below the throne, Amaunet (dressed, of course, in only a couple of leather strips that barely covered anything worth covering) sat playing happily with her adopted primordial dwarf, Edris. The Goddess of wind and air giggled merrily with Edris. She would flick her hand and a short burst of wind would lift him off the ground and gently set him back down. Then she would make him levitate and do circles and loops in midair... and, at one point, had him dive-bomb Isis, missing her at the last second.

The two friends laughed and laughed.

Amaunet loved her little primordial dwarf more than anything else in the entire world... **except for maybe a good burst of wind every now and then in a crowded room.**

Unfortunately, their playfulness bothered the Goddess Mother. There she was, trying to figure out their next move in preventing the Christians from winning Armageddon and destroying mankind and all that Amaunet could do was amuse yourself with her... plaything.

"That will be enough, Amaunet." Isis ordered, tapping her staff loudly on the marble floor. "We have more important things to do than tossing midgets around like toys."

"He's not a midget, Goddess Mother, he's a..."

“I don’t care what he is... at this point, he’s gone!” And, with another rap of her staff, Edris vanished. “We have to get serious if we’re going to prevent those damn Christians and Hathor from destroying the world. I need both of you on your best behavior if we are to succeed.”

At hearing this comment, Menthu, who was on the other side of the room with his right arm stretched out holding something invisible, muttered: “What more do you want from me? I’m holding up this Beatrice woman like you ordered – not asked, but ordered, mind you... Now you want me to think and hold someone up off the ground at the same time? I’m the God of strength, virility and victory – not thinking. If you wanted someone to think, than maybe you should have recruited Saraswati ... now she was a thinker.”

“And a Hindu,” Isis snapped.

“Jesus Christ –“ Menthu started, but was quickly cut off.

“Don’t you dare bring ‘HIM’ into this conversation. Both of you just shut up and let me think.”

Menthu shook his head, making the golden hawk faceplate he wore scrape across his unseen face; Amaunet just sat there pouting, annoyingly tapping her foot to an off-beat only she could hear; and Isis thought long and hard...

Back in my apartment, Aaron walked cautiously around Beatrice... pondering our current predicament and examining the situation from every angle.

“This just doesn’t make sense,” he finally said. He put his hands on his hips in defeat, a defining characteristic of his that really annoyed me. “Why does she just hang there? I’ve taken off the spell I put on her, but she’s still not responding.”

“Maybe I should call Shepherd?” I suggested for several different reasons – the main one being that I would at least have another ally in the apartment with me once Beatrice did wake.

WARNING: The following anti-Semitic remarks expressed herein are not endorsed by any member of WritingRaw. We apologize that such characters exist, but they do.

Besides, antichrists are really bad people anyway.

Aaron groaned. “Now why would we want to have that Jew be in any part of this? Didn’t Father teach you anything? The Jews can’t be trusted.”

I felt like slapping him – but, technically, he was still a child and I would never abuse a child, even if he was my possible replacement as the antichrist and that he tried to kill me.

“Why do you have to be like that? You know, this world would be so much better if there were less racist and anti-Semitic people –“

“Whoa, hold on one minute,” he shouted. “Get your head out of your ass, Shakespeare! We are the antichrist – or one of us is and, from hearing that last statement, my bet is that it’s not you. Jews can’t be trusted. You will get Shepherd over here and next thing you know he will be borrowing money from us and preaching about how Christ died for OUR sins. No way, I’m definitely not going to be part of that shtick. Mom tried to get me to go to church once and that went over like a lead balloon –“

“That’s it!”

Isis cried out, causing both Amaunet and Menthu to jump.

“We need to be proactive in this and –“

“But my skin is perfect,” Amaunet defended, “Not a pimple in sight.”

“This mask doesn’t really do wonders for my skin though,” Menthu added. “Maybe I could use a little skincare products to...”

Isis slammed her staff back down on the floor as hard as she could. The sound reverberated throughout the room. “Both of you just shut up and listen to what I have to say. This has nothing to do with skincare! We need to torture Shepherd, get him to break down so that it will weaken HIS influence on Earth. Amaunet, release the flying pigs.”

Amaunet looked confused. “Don’t you mean the flying monkeys?”

Isis rolled her eyes, questioning why she was working with such inept people.

“Listen, if I was going to fuck with Jane Goodall, wouldn’t it make more sense to then send out the flying monkeys... but Shepherd is Jewish... thus, we need the flying pigs. Jewish people dislike pigs for some Christian reason. We need the flying pigs to prevent Shepherd from going over to Shakespeare’s apartment. We need to keep them apart for a while until I can figure out how to put a major tension between them that will break Shakespeare’s trust in him. We have to divide these people if we are to conquer them.”

“What about Beatrice,” Menthu asked, his arm getting tired. “How long am I supposed to hold on to her?”

“She’s our next step in my devious plan,” Isis laughed. “Divide and conquer, remember. Menthu, bring her to us... immediately.”

Without warning,

right before our very eyes...

Beatrice started to shimmer, a golden light radiating from all around her...

and then she vanished in a puff of smoke.

“Damn,” Aaron and I said together, “Sure wasn’t expecting that.”

End of Episode 10

Episode 11: **Confusion Now Hath Made His Masterpiece!**

About an hour after Beatrice's baffling disappearance, Aaron and I found ourselves sitting on the couch, somewhat speechless, and staring at the spot she once hung.

"I want my mommy back," Aaron finally sniveled.

I laughed, the mean kind of laugh – an antichrist kind of laugh: "Oooohhhh, the new big bad evil antichrist wants his mommy back. What? You gonna start crying now? Should I get you some tissues?"

He crossed his arms and pouted. "Plain and simple, Shakespeare, fuck you."

After this remark, we both dropped the subject and continued to stare at the empty void. Millions of thoughts raced through our heads. Sure, both of us had powers that most mortals could never comprehend, but making people vanish into thin air was more David Blaine and Siegfried and Roy type parlor tricks... not antichrist, destroy the world kind of shit. No, what made Beatrice vanish was something totally different and new. This was divine intervention kind of stuff. Whether good or bad, someone wanted her gone from that situation and just, kind of, took her.

Was it to save my life?

Was it for a greater purpose that only she could be of use in?

Was it simply spontaneous combustion without the combustion?

"So," Aaron spoke calmly and slowly, "What do you think we should do?"

I shrugged. "We have one of two choices... first – we can get some sleep since the sun is coming up and then deal with this later with a totally fresh mind; or, we can give Shepherd a call and see what he has to say."

"You know my feelings about involving the other side, but..." he went quiet, groaned, and admitted defeat, "Maybe we should give him a call."

Without hesitation, I stood up and walked over to the phone.

Back in the South Side of Potter's Field...

Isis, Amaunet, and Manthu stood around a golden regency bed and stared down at Beatrice's sleeping form, which was covered in the finest red satin. She looked so comfortable – she even had a slight smile on her face – that none of them wanted to wake her. In fact, they had no idea if they wanted to wake her at all at this point... Isis's plan was to get her, but what to do with her after that was still a mystery.

Finally, Amaunet broke the silence. "Do you think the flying pigs have reached Shepherd yet?"

"Most likely not," Isis replied in a hushed tone. "You know how slow those pigs fly. They probably won't reach him for another couple of hours."

Immediately, Isis held up her hands to signal for silence. She cocked her head slightly to the right, as if listening to something that only she could hear.

"Hey, Shepherd, how you doing this morning?" I spoke in a light, carefree voice. "Hope I didn't wake you."

"No, I've been having some really strange dreams all night. Is everything alright with you?"

"With me? Now why would you ask a question like that?"

"One of the dreams was that someone was trying to kill you. It's a little foggy but I remember some woman sitting on top of you with a knife and a little boy telling her to kill you. Really strange and confusing..."

"Oh that... well, that's why I'm calling you. See, last night I had a little incident that kind of happened just the way you described."

"Are you alright?" He asked with worry in his voice.

"Oh, you know me," I giggled like a school girl in love. Aaron cleared his throat, making it clear that this was a business call and not some lover's chat. I shot him an angry look and turned my back on him. "No, I'm fine... I wouldn't have been, but it seems that while I was passed out you kept yelling at me to wake up."

“Yeah, I remember that... so it must have been a precognitive dream to save you. Strange, nothing like that’s ever happened to me before. Guess our bond is stronger than I thought.”

Again, another giggle, “I keep telling you that but you won’t listen to me. Anyway, I really need you to come over as soon as possible. There are some situations going on right now that I don’t understand and need your help with.”

“Well, I just got out of bed. I can be over there in an hour or so.”

“Please, forget the shower and stuff. Just throw on some clothes and get over here as fast as you can... this has something to do with... Armageddon.”

Without a pause, he replied: “I’ll be right there.”

Then the phone went dead in my hand.

“Shit,” Isis screamed. “We moved too fucking fast! Shepherd is on his way over to Shakespeare’s”

At this outburst, Beatrice’s eyes snapped open. Confused, she sat up in the bed and stared at the three Egyptian deities standing around her – one topless woman, another who wore a strap of the thinnest leather to cover her intimate parts, and a very muscular man who wore a golden hawk faceplate to conceal his identity. Her eyes widened in fear. PERVERTS, her brain screamed! Her eyes darted left to right, searching for a place to run and hide from this obvious outtake from Stanley Kubrick’s, *Eyes Wide Shut*. There was no escape. The only thing she could see past these strange individuals and the bed was an endless room filled with white fluffy clouds. Not knowing what to do or how to react, she pulled the satin sheets up to her chin to hide her already covered breasts.

“What the hell is going on here?” She said, finding her voice. “Where the hell am I? Where’s my son?”

“Now, just calm down, Beatrice,” the bare-chested woman said with a smile. “Everything’s going to be fine.”

“How do you know my name? Oh my God, was I drugged and sold into white slavery? Are you three going to rape me? Turn me into your own private sex slave?”

Even under his golden mask, one could tell that Menthu was smiling. “She does present an interesting solution to our problem.”

“That will be enough, Manthu!” Isis replied sternly. “Beatrice is our guest... not one of your playthings for your sick perverted rock-n-roll parties you’re always throwing in the basement of the heavens. You either get serious here, or leave!”

Menthu lowered his head and mumbled an apology.

Isis turned her attention back to Beatrice. “We’re your friends, Beatrice. We saved you from committing a very bad act on someone that matter’s very much to us. Do you recall anything before you went to sleep?”

Beatrice thought long and hard before speaking: “I remember... Shakespeare... the young man, not the poet/playwright or the guy who invented the level-wind reel... we were having a few drinks, having a good time... then we were turning in for the night... That’s about it. The rest is a blank... Where’s Shakespeare? Where’s my son, Aaron? Have you freaks done anything bad to them? Why won’t you answer any of my questions?”

“In due time, Beatrice...” Isis walked cautiously over to the bed and gently sat down on the side. “We just have a lot to explain to you and we have to do it in a way that you understand. Perhaps you’d like a nice cup of passion flower, valerian root and ashwagandha root tea to start with. Calm you down some. Amaunet, bring Beatrice some tea...”

Right before Beatrice’s eyes, Amaunet vanished in a white flash.

“Now,” Isis continued, “While we wait for that tea... let’s just get some of the preliminaries out of the way first. Did you know that your son is the antichrist –“

Beatrice started screaming at the top of her lungs.

Menthu chuckled, somewhat smugly: “Oh wise, mother... maybe you should’ve waited for the tea.”

When the doorbell rang I ran to the door and opened it.

Shepherd pushed past me in haste and slammed the door behind him. He was frightened. Moving quickly, he locked the door and leaned his back against it, as if preventing something from entering.

“What the hell’s going on Shakespeare?” He demanded.

Aaron entered the hallway behind me. He sneered. “So this is the famous Shepherd I’ve heard so much about.”

Shepherd looked at Aaron, looked at me, and then back at Aaron... confusion swarmed his face and eyes. "That's the boy from my dream," he finally said.

"Yes, it is," I said in the calmest voice I could muster. Something wasn't right. I'd never seen Shepherd this upset before. He was the epitome of calmness in any situation. "Shepherd, is everything alright?"

"Hell no everything's not alright!"

"What's the problem?"

"Pigs," he shouted, "There are flying fucking pigs out there!"

After saying that, we could suddenly hear things hurling themselves at the locked door...

and that's when the demonic oinking started...

End of Episode 11

Episode 12: **Nothing Can Come Of Nothing**

“I don’t see anything.”

I said, my left eye pressed tightly against the door’s peephole. I could get a fish-eyed view of the apartment’s main hallway. Nothing was there. The hallway was empty.

Though the thuds against the door stopped after about five minutes, every now and then we could hear a demonic snort or two... as if letting us know that they were still there.

Waiting.

“You’re sure they were flying pigs,” I questioned Shepherd – my eye never leaving the peephole.

“Shakespeare, I think I’d know what a flying pig looks like.”

Aaron cleared his throat, “And how would you know that?”

“Well, I meant metaphorically, of course.” Shepherd snapped. “Of course I wouldn’t know what a ‘real’ flying pig looks like. A monkey, yes, but not a flying pig... wait, why am I even acknowledging you. Who the heck are you? Why are you even here? Shouldn’t you be in bed or something?”

“You really need to catch-up, God-lover. I’m the antichrist.”

I pulled myself from the door and turned to confront the little shit: “Possible antichrist! I’m still here and going to proceed exactly as planned until someone tells me different.”

“Well” he retorted with a sneer, “If that bitch would have done her job before pulling a Siegfried and Roy on us, I would be THE antichrist right now.”

“Pardon the language, Lord,” Shepherd directed the comment to the ceiling before he turned to us. “What the holy hell is going on here? There can’t be TWO antichrists!”

Aaron placed his head in his hands and shook his head in disbelief.

“After eleven episodes, you’d think he’d know what’s going on. Catch up, God-lover... read the script... I think it’s in YOUR book... what’s it called? Oh yeah, THE BIBLE. And, if I had to guess, it’d say it’s listed under... What? Maybe... Revelations... you think?”

“I don’t think I like you very much.”

“I would strangle him to death,” I said in all seriousness, “If I only had...”

And all of us said it at once “... thumbs.”

After drinking the cup of tea that Amaunet gave her, Beatrice took the information that Aaron was possibly the backup antichrist with a little more ease. She settled back on the bed with a smile, her eyes barely open and just kept saying, “Ooooooh yeah,” to everything Isis told her. Her body hummed merrily... everything around her breathed seductively; in and out... colors were vibrant, almost living...

Menthu leaned over to Isis and whispered: “I think she’s tripping.”

“Ya think?” Amaunet giggled, running her finger inside the coffee cup in an attempt to get the very last few drops for herself.

“Beatrice,” Isis said, snapping her fingers inches from her face, “Beatrice, are you in there?”

“Ooooooh yeah,” Beatrice repeated.

“Useless, totally fucking useless,” Isis snapped. “Why in the name of all that’s holy would passion flower, valerian root and ashwagandha root tea make someone trip. She’s supposed to be relaxed, subdued, not following Alice down some fucking rabbit hole.”

Amaunet thought for a moment, a smile slowly growing from ear to ear. “Let’s see... passion flower... valerian root... ashwagandha root... and psilocybin tea... now why would that make –“

“Oh no you didn’t,” Menthu mumbled from behind his mask.

Isis froze.

“Ooooooh yeah,” Beatrice said one last time before falling into a deep sleep.

“Only the Jew can see the pigs,” Aaron pointed out. “Jeez, you’d think that I’m working with a couple of amateurs here. Someone, or thing, is working against us here. Don’t either of you understand that? More have joined this game than we know about.”

“Well, they can’t get in here unless someone lets them,” I pointed out and then quickly turned to Aaron, “And YOU will not be opening any doors behind our backs.”

Aaron scrunched up his face. “You know, for an antichrist, you’re just not very fun Shakespeare. I’m gonna leave the two of you alone to work this out... I’ve got to take a shit.”

With that, Aaron turned and locked himself in the bathroom.

“I have to keep reminding myself that I am God’s emissary,” Shepherd said with a groan. “Some of the old passages from the Good Book are still as valuable today as they were then.”

If a man have a stubborn and rebellious son, which will not obey the voice of his father, or the voice of his mother, and that, when they have chastened him, will not hearken unto them: Then shall his father and his mother lay hold on him, and bring him out unto the elders of his city, and unto the gate of his place; And they shall say unto the elders of his city, This our son is stubborn and rebellious, he will not obey our voice; he is a glutton, and a drunkard. And all the men of his city shall stone him with stones, that he die: so shalt thou put evil away from among you; and all Israel shall hear, and fear. – Deuteronomy 21:18-21

“Don’t let him get to you. It’s been a long night and I’m sure all of us are a little on edge with all this mumble-jumble going on.” I turned and started for the kitchen. “Come inside. I’ll make us some coffee and bagels while we try and figure this out.”

Shepherd followed with a good natured laugh. “Bagels... is that another slam at me for being Jewish?”

We entered the kitchen and Shepherd sat at the table. He frowned at the empty beer cans but didn’t acknowledge them verbally to me – for once. Yes, he was a tea-toddler and didn’t agree in partaking in of anything alcoholic or narcotic (even if it was a naturally grown plant that HIS God placed on this Earth for our enjoyment).

“Not at all,” I said, opening a drawer and bringing out a large serrated edged knife. “People in Hell love a good bagel just as much as anyone else. So what would you like? I have salt, blueberry, or everything bagels?”

“Everything would be fine.”

I reached into a brown paper bag sitting on the counter and pulled out a day old everything bagel, laid it on the granite counter, and cut it in two.

“Toasted?”

“Of course, and with a little smear of cream cheese if you have it.”

I popped the bagel halves into the toaster and went to the refrigerator to retrieve the cream cheese. With that in hand I set it on the counter, next to the toaster, so it could soften some.

“So, what do you think all this means?” I asked, sitting across from Shepherd. “I’ve been racking my brain all night and can’t come up with anything. Nothing prepared me for anything like this... Nuclear explosion, no problem; pandemic, again, chapter 43 paragraph 4... but two antichrists existing at the same time, flying pigs, unknown ‘whatever’s’ sticking their noses in where it doesn’t belong. None of it makes sense.”

“Can’t you just call someone and find out what the heck is going on?”

I shook my head, “Doesn’t work that way in OUR world. The only way I can speak to Father is if I offer him something of mine that I value... another little piece of myself, one could say.”

“More fingers?”

Sacrifice: the offering of animal, plant, or human life or of some material possession to a deity, as in propitiation or homage; the surrender or destruction of something prized or desirable for the sake of something considered as having a higher or more pressing claim.

“No, something more than just fingers this time.”

The smell of bagels toasting filled the room. I stared at Shepherd. He continued to talk but I didn’t hear a word he said. My mind was elsewhere... searching through all my lessons on how I could do this without involving Father. Nothing – no footnotes or cross-references could be found. With all the knowledge passed down to me from antichrist to antichrist, there wasn’t an easy answer for this one.

This is a test, I said to myself. I am being tested and my response will either further our cause or destroy me.

“Shakespeare,” Shepherd said loudly, “Are you there? The bagels are ready.”

I snapped out of my reverie and shook my head. “Yes, sorry, the bagel...”

Beatrice dreamed that she was on a large lake, at sunset, in a small aluminum V hull boat, dressed as a well-to-do woman of the sixteenth century. Her hair was parted in the center, fluffed around the temples, with most of it pinned under a caul of silk lined net-working. Even though she stood in the boat, she wore a loose sky-blue gown of light-weight silk over a bodice and skirt that had an open-necked partlet, showcasing her ample breasts.

In her hands, she held a Shakespeare crafted two-piece medium fishing rod with a stainless steel spinning reel...

“STOP,” she screamed at the top of her lungs. “I’m not playing this game again. It’s very redundant and unnecessary. If you want to talk to me, then fucking talk to me!”

In a heartbeat, everything vanished and once more she found herself floating in the bright nothingness.

“Sorry about that,” the ominous man’s voice said from all around her. “My bad...”

“My bad? My bad? Listen, this is getting to be too much for me. Stop trying to be hip, stop with all the bullshit and just tell me what you want. It’s bad enough that in reality – if any of this can be considered reality – a bunch of fucking weirdo’s are holding me hostage and telling me that I’m the mother of the antichrist.”

“Aaron is not the antichrist... not yet. Shakespeare must die before Aaron can take his place. That is why I have brought you before me. Decisions that are out of my hands have been made... the Great War is about to begin. We have to plan your escape if WE are to succeed in obtaining peace throughout the universe and the heavens. Many Gods must be appeased, and quickly.”

“And how do you plan on me escaping? I don’t even know where I am or what the fuck is going on.”

“Beatrice, listen closely, there are those who are working against the one’s who hold you. Speak with, Edris...”

“The primordial dwarf?”

“Yes... Edris is our spy. He will help you. You must shake off this narcotic spell that they placed on you and escape back to your own reality. It may be too late... but you have to try.”

“Fine, I have to trust you on this one. Now send me back so I can get the fuck out of this nightmare.”

In a flash, Beatrice found herself back on the bed with Isis, Amaunet and Menthu standing around her. She raised her aching head and moaned at the sight of them.

Everyone smiled.

Behind Amaunet, Edris looked from behind her legs and winked...

I took the hot bagel out of the toaster and placed it on a plate. I stared at it... my brain going into overdrive. I had to do something. This wasn't about me any more; this was about the destruction of the entire thumbed tribe. I couldn't allow my feelings – feelings that I should never have developed in the first place – to overshadow why I was born, why I was tortured. Sometimes an antichrist has to do things that he doesn't always agree with... sometimes, he has to sacrifice a little piece of himself...

In one hand I picked up the plate and in the other the knife. I turned toward Shepherd, who sat with his back to me. He continued to talk, words pouring from his mouth that I did not understand or comprehend. I took a hesitant step toward him, then another, and another... until I was behind him.

Without thinking, the plate dropped from my hand...

I grabbed the back of Shepherd's head and pulled it back as fast and hard as I could...

Brought the knife up to his throat...

And slit it

From behind me, I heard Aaron whisper with a slight quiver of fear in his voice:

“You’re really bad, Shakespeare...”

End of Season One