

Posthumous
by
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UNDER BLACK

1

The distraught grumbling of an older man is heard, as are the audible noises of loading and cocking a gun.

The noises belong to BURGESS LEECH, a disgruntled, unrealized author of fiction.

A moment of intense breathing is heard and then a loud gunshot. There's audible blood splatter, Leech's body is heard hitting the floor and a muffled female scream follows.

FADE IN FROM
WHITE:

2

INT. DINER - AMBIGUOUS TIME

2

Burgess opens his eyes slowly, as though he's awaking from a dream, his eyes adjust to the bright white atmosphere, which is revealed to be the ultra-bright lights of an old-fashioned diner.

Sitting beside Burgess, seated at the counter, is a nondescript man. This is Burgess' GUIDE in the afterlife.

GUIDE (O.C.)
Burgess, what do you want to eat?

BURGESS LEECH
(groggy, coming to)
What? Am...am I--

GUIDE (O.C.)
I said, what do you want to eat?

BURGESS LEECH
(still groggy)
Wha-- I'm...

Burgess reaches up and feels the back of his head.

The Guide turns his attention to the waitress ROXANNE behind the counter.

GUIDE
Just make it two coffees.

Roxanne nods and walks away to fulfill the order.

GUIDE (CONT'D)
(calling after Roxanne)
And Roxanne! Make them strong.

BURGESS LEECH
 (to Guide)
 Am...am I...dead?

GUIDE
 (matter-of-factly)
 Yes.

BURGESS LEECH
 (confused)
 I'm sorry, what did you just say?

GUIDE
 You asked if you were dead and I
 answered, 'yes.'

Burgess is stunned and confused.

Roxanne returns with the coffee. The Guide passes a cup to
 Burgess.

GUIDE (CONT'D)
 Thank you, Roxanne.

BURGESS LEECH
 (confused, disoriented)
 Roxanne?

GUIDE
 (to Burgess)
 Here, drink this.

The Guide helps the cup to Burgess' lips. Burgess takes a big
 gulp. Once the liquid is swallowed, Burgess reacts to the
 strength of the coffee with an unsatisfied face.

GUIDE (CONT'D)
 There, is that better?

BURGESS LEECH
 No. This is terrible.

GUIDE
 I can tell her to make a fresh pot.

BURGESS LEECH
 Not the coffee! The fact that
 you're telling me I'm dead.

GUIDE
 But you are dead.

BURGESS LEECH

I know. You've made that very clear.

GUIDE

If you don't believe me, think back for yourself. Try to remember what you were doing before you arrived here.

Burgess thinks deeply.

3 INT. HOTEL ROOM - DAY 3

A perspiring and anguished Burgess holds a gun in his mouth. He snaps his eyes shut tightly and his finger twitches over the trigger.

4 INT. DINER - AMBIGUOUS TIME 4

GUIDE

Remember now?

BURGESS LEECH

(aggravated, confused)

Okay, if I'm dead, who are you?
Where am I?

GUIDE

This is the afterlife.

Burgess is stunned. He looks around at his less-than-heavenly surroundings.

BURGESS LEECH

(disappointed, sarcastic)

This is the afterlife?

GUIDE

Yes.

BURGESS LEECH

But this is a diner.

GUIDE

Yes.

BURGESS LEECH

(aggravated)

Jesus, you're not going to be one of those cryptic guide characters, are you?

(MORE)

BURGESS LEECH (CONT'D)
 You know, one word responses and
 answering every question with a
 question so I never know what the
 hell you're talking about...

GUIDE
 Why? Are the answers you seek
 complex?

BURGESS LEECH
 (aggravated)
 See! That's what I mean, right
 there!

GUIDE
 (mildly amused)
 You can ask me whatever questions
 you like and I'll do my best to
 answer them.

Short pause.

BURGESS LEECH
 (almost rhetorically)
 I just can't believe this. You're
 telling me I finally worked up the
 nerve to kill myself and I'm
 basically back where I started.

GUIDE
 You're disappointed?

BURGESS LEECH
 Yes, absolutely I'm disappointed.
 The afterlife is alarmingly similar
 to life. I was expecting eternal
 nothingness, blackness, or maybe
 even an infinite white room. I
 wouldn't go as far to say I was
 expecting a Heaven, per se, but
 certainly not this.

GUIDE
 I thought you'd be relieved. Don't
 you think anything is better than
 nothing?

BURGESS LEECH
 (matter-of-factly)
 No. Nothing is always better than
 something. Nothing changes when
 you've got nothing. You can't lose
 anything...

GUIDE

You weren't a very positive person,
were you?

BURGESS LEECH

Hey, I was a suicide, remember? I
was looking forward to being out-of-
it for all eternity. Consciousness
is too much responsibility, there's
too much pain and suffering
involved... And... I think...
(makes face of sensing a
sensation)...I think I have to
piss. (upset) This is just great, I
thought all bodily functions and
public defecation would be the
first things I crossed off my
comprehensive list of anxieties
once I was dead.

The Guide is annoyed by Burgess complaining.

GUIDE

Here, how's this?

5

EXT. NON-DESCRIPT OUTDOOR LOCATION - DAY

5

Burgess and the Guide suddenly appear in an outdoor area that
resembles a more typical "heaven" esthetic.

GUIDE

Is this more of what you were
thinking?

Burgess is visibly uneasy by the sudden relocation. He looks
around, taking in the new landscape. He then looks toward the
Guide with a serious, knowing face.

BURGESS LEECH

This isn't a dream. I'm really
dead.

GUIDE

I'm afraid so.

BURGESS LEECH

How did we get here?

GUIDE

It's one of my gifts. I can
transport us anywhere you'd like to
go.

Burgess looks around once more.

BURGESS LEECH
It's strange...

GUIDE
What's that?

BURGESS LEECH
I feel like I've seen this place
before...

6 EXT. GRAVEYARD - DAY

6

Burgess stands among many graves in a cemetery, the Guide beside him.

GUIDE
You'd be surprised how many people
don't believe they're dead at
first. Usually takes something to
shock their system.

BURGESS LEECH
It's funny, I wrote a short story
about that once.

GUIDE
People not knowing they're dead?

BURGESS LEECH
Yeah. They died and then they woke
up as though they were dreaming;
continued to go about their
business as if they were alive.
They didn't have the luxury of
their own personal angel telling
them that they no longer existed.

GUIDE
I'm not an angel.

BURGESS LEECH
Then what are you?

GUIDE
(cryptically, slightly
sarcastic, comically
confused)
What am I? Or who am I?

Burgess rolls his eyes.

Short pause.

BURGESS LEECH

So this is it?

Burgess stands upon his own grave and looks down upon the gravestone.

GUIDE

Yep. Beneath your feet is all that remains of Burgess Leech.

BURGESS LEECH

(disdainful)

They buried me next to my father. Now he can be eternally disappointed in me.

GUIDE

I'm sensing a conflict between you and your father.

BURGESS LEECH

And you're perceptive, too. Why aren't you up in Heaven, working directly for God, part of his propaganda ministry, making the big bucks? I hear they have great benefits. Medical. Dental. The first six months of harp lessons are free.

GUIDE

Tell me more about your father.

BURGESS LEECH

Father's are usually what stands between a child and a well-adjusted life. Mine died when I was nine. He must have known his time was limited because he fit all that disfunction into just a few years.

Short pause.

BURGESS LEECH (CONT'D)

On his deathbed I asked him if he saw a white light or family members calling out to him from beyond the grave... He looked at me and said...

7 INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

7

NINE-YEAR-OLD BURGESS stands before his dying FATHER, who is lying on his deathbed, weak and sickly.

FATHER

(angrily)

Don't be such a fucking moron.
There's no white light and there is no God. ...There's also no Santa Claus, Easter Bunny or Tooth-Fairy, either while we're at it. Now get out of here and let me die in peace!

Traumatized, Nine-year-old Burgess walks away from his Father.

8 EXT. GRAVEYARD - DAY

8

BURGESS LEECH

That's the day I became an atheist...and stopped celebrating most major holidays.

The Guide makes a face of disbelief.

GUIDE

(to himself)

Good god.

BURGESS LEECH

My thoughts exactly. It's nice to know that if I'm here, he's probably in Hell.

GUIDE

So you've been without faith since adolescence?

BURGESS LEECH

That's right. It would perturb him to know, but my father actually did me a favor. Saved me a lot of time sharing small confessionals with robed men.

GUIDE

But you were never totally convinced?

Burgess pauses and contemplates.

BURGESS LEECH
Well, something did happen once
that made me doubt my devout
doubtfulness.

GUIDE
What was that?

Short pause.

BURGESS LEECH
I was visited by the Angel of
Death.

9 INT. BURGESS' BEDROOM - NIGHT

9

Burgess is sleeping beside his WIFE (widow). He clumsily gets out of bed, reaches for his eyeglasses and fumbles to the doorway.

BURGESS LEECH (V.O.)
I've since considered this event a
dream, but I've never quite been
able to convince myself... I got
out of bed to take a piss and when
I got to the hallway and looked
into the bathroom, there, sitting
on the toilet was Death.

DEATH (Grim Reaper) is hunch on the toilet, sitting with his head down. Burgess freezes and stares at the ominously black, cloaked figure.

BURGESS LEECH (V.O.)
When I saw him, I froze. But it was
strange, I didn't feel frightened.

GUIDE (V.O.)
Then what happened?

BURGESS LEECH (V.O.)
He slowly raised his head and
looked at me. He didn't have eyes,
but I knew he was looking at me.

Death looks up and stares chillingly toward Burgess.

GUIDE (V.O.)
And you didn't feel afraid?

BURGESS LEECH (V.O.)
No. I went back to bed and fell
right asleep.

10 INT. NON-SPECIFIC LOCATION (CHAPEL) - AMBIGUOUS TIME 10

Burgess is taken aback by yet another location change. He looks around at the surroundings.

BURGESS LEECH

You know you could give me a little warning before you zap us to a new place. It gives me a funny feeling.

INSERT:

A beautiful YOUNG BRIDE is shown, smiling, looking radiant inside the Chapel.

11 INT. NON-SPECIFIC LOCATION (CHAPEL) - AMBIGUOUS TIME 11

Burgess is visibly lost in thought, his eyes wide.

GUIDE

You'll get used to it. I just thought a cemetery was a little too dreary.

Burgess stands on the alter in the front of the room beside a statue of Jesus Christ on the cross. He breaks his deeply-thinking trance and responds to the Guide.

BURGESS LEECH

(in reference to the statue)

Yeah, much more cheerful.

GUIDE

Go on with your story. You went back to bed and fell right to sleep...

BURGESS LEECH

Right. So, the next morning I woke up and recalled what had happened during the night, like I said, dismissing it as a dream, but the strange thing is I found out that my neighbor, Mrs. Attlebom across the street, had died during the night...

12 INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT 12

An old woman, MARTHA ATTLEBOM lies in bed. The Grim Reaper stands beside the bed, looming a dark finger toward her.

GRIM REAPER

(deep, scary, otherworldly
voice)

Martha Attlebom, your hour has
come. Bring only what you can
carry. Make sure all liquids are
below 3.4 fluid ounces or they will
be confiscated.

13 INT. NON-SPECIFIC LOCATION (CHAPEL) - AMBIGUOUS TIME 13

The Guide continues to listen intently.

BURGESS LEECH

It got me thinking...could it be
just a coincidence that I dreamed
of the Grim Reaper the exact same
night that a person dies next door?
But then the awful question struck
me, if there really is an Angel of
Death and he really did come to
collect Mrs. Attlebom's soul, why
appear to me? Was he warning me?
Was I next on his list? And more
specifically, why was he on my
toilet? It looked like I caught him
right in the middle of one of those
truly mystical bowel movements,
where your entire lower half feels
numb afterward. ...And that's when
I concocted my theory that our
souls are like food for these
paranormal creatures, that the best
thing we can hope for as an
afterlife is to end up as the shit
of some otherworldly being.

GUIDE

Where do you fit in to this theory?

BURGESS LEECH

That's what I didn't understand. I
still didn't know why he had chosen
to appear to me. For the next
several days I was a nervous
wreck...

14 INT. ROOM - DAY 14

Burgess sits visibly paranoid over his typewriter while a
cigarette burns nearly to the filter.

There's a noise and he immediately whips his head around in both directions, his face one of panic and terror.

BURGESS LEECH (V.O.)
 ...feeling like death was lurking
 wherever I went, but after a while
 nothing happened...

15 INT. NON-SPECIFIC LOCATION (CHAPEL) - AMBIGUOUS TIME 15

Burgess concludes his story, the Guide continues to listen.

BURGESS LEECH
 ...so I thought maybe Mrs.
 Attlebom's soul simply didn't sit
 well with Death and He had to get
 it out before moving on.

GUIDE
 Wait, you mean her soul gave the
 Grim Reaper some sort of spiritual
 diarrhea?

BURGESS LEECH
 Something like that. For all we
 know her soul could have been the
 Indian food of souls.

16 INT. EXT. NON-SPECIFIC LOCATION - AMBIGUOUS TIME 16

Burgess and the Guide continue their conversation.

BURGESS LEECH
 These places you're taking me, I
 keep feeling like I've seen them
 before.

GUIDE
 (monotone, mocking Godly
 voice)
 It's not the places you've been,
 but where you're going...

BURGESS LEECH
 Now you're just trying to sound
 enigmatic... I have a question and
 try to give me a straight answer:
 What happens now? Is this it? We
 float around place to place for all
 eternity?

GUIDE

No, this isn't everything, just sort of an *in-between*.

BURGESS LEECH

You mean like Purgatory?

GUIDE

If you like.

BURGESS LEECH

So we just wait until our number gets called?

GUIDE

There's things you still need to see before we can go any further and it's my job to show them to you.

BURGESS LEECH

It's truly incredible how you answer my questions without giving me any information whatsoever. You should work at the post office, you'd be employee of the month.

GUIDE

(frustrated)

We're going to visit three people whom you've affected during your lifetime.

BURGESS LEECH

Visit three people? What is this A Christmas Carol? ...And wait, let me guess, I'm Scrooge, right? The insufferable prick who needs a change of heart?

GUIDE

Something like that.

BURGESS LEECH

Well, would you mind if we skipped the slide show? I killed myself for a reason, you know-- to escape the people in my life.

Burgess chuckles to himself in disbelief.

BURGESS LEECH (CONT'D)

Out of all the writers and philosophers who wrote about death;
(MORE)

BURGESS LEECH (CONT'D)
Nietzsche, Socrates, who would have
thought Charles Dickens was right
on the money?

GUIDE
You know what they say, 'there's
nothing new under the sun.'

BURGESS LEECH
Apparently there's nothing new
above it, either.

GUIDE
Let me ask you a question, Burgess.
Did you die with any regrets?

BURGESS LEECH
Me? Regrets? No.

GUIDE
(condescendingly
surprised)
None?

Burgess makes a face trying to mask his true feelings of
considerable regret.

BURGESS LEECH
I mean, sure, I did a few things
that if I had it to do over again,
maybe I'd change one or two things,
but I followed my dream until the
day I died and that's more than
most can say.

GUIDE
At what cost did you follow it?

BURGESS LEECH
All right, enough. Your questions
are beginning to annoy me. Don't
you have something confusing you'd
like to add to the conversation?

GUIDE
If you didn't have any regrets why
did you kill yourself?

Emotional pause.

BURGESS LEECH
I killed myself because of the lack
of meaning in the universe. Because
of how cruel this existence is.
(MORE)

BURGESS LEECH (CONT'D)

I didn't necessarily believe in a grand plan, or anything, but a personal one. I tried to be a writer my entire life. I thought that was my plan, my purpose. I wrote manuscript after manuscript. Every one of them rejected. I sacrificed everything. Had wife after a wife, a daughter I wouldn't recognize if I ran into her on the street. When my last book failed to get picked up I decided that I didn't want to go on living. That my life had amounted to nothing and that I had not another word left in me to write, so I decided to blow my brains out.

There is a moment of silence. Both the Guide and Burgess visibly dwell on the somberness of Burgess' statement.

GUIDE

(serious tone)

There's something you should know, Burgess.

BURGESS LEECH

Oh yeah? What's that?

GUIDE

You may have died anonymous, but your memory has become infamous.

Short pause. Burgess looks at the Guide and comically motions with his arms for him to continue.

GUIDE (CONT'D)

Your novel, it's been posthumously published.

Burgess is stunned.

GUIDE (CONT'D)

Like most patrons of your profession, it took dying for the world to take notice, but they've taken notice. The book was an overnight success and has been warmly received by both critics and readers alike.

BURGESS LEECH

How did this happen all so quickly? I mean, I just died!

GUIDE

To us it seems that you've just died, but on Earth you've been dead for several years already and the legend of your death has cemented itself firmly in the public conscious, as have your words, which are being called "irreverent" and "bold." "If only we'd known about him when he was alive," one prominent critic wrote.

Burgess is visibly taken aback by this news. He's dazed.

BURGESS LEECH

I think I need to sit down.

Burgess takes a seat.

BURGESS LEECH (CONT'D)

Legend. You said 'the legend of my death.'

GUIDE

Yes...Some unorthodox events took place immediately following your death, which lead to the discovery of your manuscript.

BURGESS LEECH

Which were?

GUIDE

That seedy motel you selected to off yourself in, it coincidentally was also the favorite spot of a well known politician who commonly used it to, let's say... carry out certain... *indiscretions*.

17 INT. HOTEL ROOM - DAY

17

A handsome POLITICIAN wearing only a button-down dress shirt and a tie flung over his shoulder is having vigorous intercourse with a female PROSTITUTE.

They are both making loud grunting noises of sexual ecstasy.

GUIDE (V.O.)

While you were in the next room, preparing for your graceful exit...

18 INT. HOTEL ROOM - DAY 18

Burgess has the gun in his mouth. He's clinching his eyes, preparing to pull the trigger. The muffled sound of a bed's headboard banging against the wall is heard.

19 INT. HOTEL ROOM - DAY 19

The Politician continues to have intercourse with the Prostitute.

GUIDE (V.O.)

Our publicly elected official
became a victim of circumstance.

POLITICIAN

(overcome with pleasure)

I think I'm gonna... I think I'm
gonna--

Suddenly a gunshot is heard, as is the sound of the bullet piercing the hotel room wall. Blood shoots out of the Politician's chest, covering the prostitute. He lifelessly collapses on top of her and she screams wildly.

20 EXT. - NON-SPECIFIC LOCATION - AMBIGUOUS TIME 20

Burgess is floored by the story he's just heard. His eyes are wide as he processes the information.

BURGESS LEECH

(in disbelief)

Oh my god...

GUIDE

I suppose a congratulations is in
order.

BURGESS LEECH

(upset)

What are you talking about? I
didn't do anything. I got lucky
some horny senator liked to fuck
whores in the same shithole where I
decided to kill myself.

(rhetorically) Jesus Christ, I
can't fucking believe this. I
finally get what I've always wanted
and I'm too dead to enjoy it. This
is it, this is that feeling...

GUIDE

What feeling?

BURGESS LEECH

Every author has it, the fear and the comfort that maybe your work will get discovered after you're dead. It's the last hope of a failed artist. I now know how Franz Kafka must have felt.

GUIDE

How's that?

BURGESS LEECH

Kafka, for the most part, died in obscurity. I always figured it didn't matter, that you wouldn't know the difference, that at least your work would live on after you, but now that I'm aware of it I can't help but feel... royally screwed. I wonder if Kafka felt as gypped as I do.

GUIDE

You can ask him yourself. He's right over there.

Burgess looks and is visibly surprised to see the famous author.

FRANZ KAFKA is shown reading. Burgess approaches him.

BURGESS LEECH

Excuse me. How do you feel about this, getting famous after you die, never being appreciated for your art while you were alive, the idea of your work living on and becoming immortal for generation after generation to appreciate?

FRANZ KAFKA

(in German, subtitled)
It's bullshit.

Burgess throws up his arms in agreement.

BURGESS LEECH

(emphatically)
Thank you!

GUIDE
Burgess, there's more.

BURGESS LEECH
(vanquished)
What?!

GUIDE
Come see for yourself...

21 INT. AGENT'S BEDROOM - DAY

21

Burgess and the Guide appear inside a bedroom. They're standing beside a bed where two people are nosily making love beneath the sheets.

Burgess is shocked by the image before him.

BURGESS LEECH
(to Guide)
Christ, you're a fucking pervert.

The Guide brushes this remark off and rolls his eyes.

GUIDE
Look under the sheet.

Burgess looks hesitant.

GUIDE (CONT'D)
Go on, they won't mind.

WOMAN
Oh yeah!

Burgess lifts the sheets and looks inside. He quickly lowers them, his face one of surprise followed by anger.

BURGESS LEECH
That's my agent... and my ex wife!

GUIDE
Yes, they've been seeing each other
for some time.

BURGESS LEECH
How long?

WOMAN
Fuck me!

GUIDE

Long before you were divorced, but they recently eloped while vacationing in the Hamptons, a romantic gesture made possible by the sizable percentage he made from the sale of your book.

WOMAN

Yeah, fuck me harder, baby!

BURGESS LEECH

The sale of my book? You're telling me I paid for my agent to marry my ex-wife!

GUIDE

That is correct.

MAN

Call me daddy!

BURGESS LEECH

How much money did he make?

WOMAN

I'm going to cum!

GUIDE

The book was a number one seller for 52 weeks. Without you around he took an unheard-of 30% of what was made from the sale and also arranged to receive residuals from each copy sold. Your death made him a millionaire...

Burgess' face is one of disbelief.

MAN

Stick a finger in my ass!

The Guide and Burgess simultaneously look toward the couple and make surprised, comic faces.

Burgess and the Guide continue their conversation.

BURGESS LEECH

Un-fucking-believable. For years that guy never once placed a manuscript with a publisher, never made me dollar one, and now he's using my money to screw my wife up the ass.

GUIDE

Technically, it's up his ass...

BURGESS LEECH

And how could she, my second wife, the mother of my child, how could she do this to me? That's the ultimate betrayal.

GUIDE

Why, you've been divorced from her for years and...didn't you sleep with other women during your marriage?

BURGESS LEECH

What's your point?

The Guide shrugs.

BURGESS LEECH (CONT'D)

It's all right, at least now I don't feel so bad about giving her herpes. And hopefully, God willing, she gave it to him. That's the one upside to sexually transmitted diseases, they're like a shotgun blast if you want to use them as revenge.

GUIDE

How did you get herpes?

BURGESS LEECH

From a whore. She came over, very nice girl, I paid her the money, she didn't tell me she had it and I didn't use a condom.

GUIDE

You know you could sue her for not telling you she had it.

BURGESS LEECH

And what good would that do me? I'm still gonna have it.

(MORE)

BURGESS LEECH (CONT'D)

You know, they have these television commercials for medications and they show a happy couple, you know, horseback riding or canoeing, leading normal lives. Yes, it's true, you can still canoe with herpes, but what they don't tell you is you'll never be able to sleep with someone without first meeting with their attorney.

GUIDE

If you had it to do again, would you have been more faithful?

BURGESS LEECH

(angry)

Absolutely not. I would have been purposefully more unfaithful. And I'm telling you, as soon as I get to Heaven, I'm going to fuck the first angel I see.

Burgess abruptly gets distracted by a beautiful woman in the distance. She's wrapped only in white cloth. She is a GREEK SIREN.

BURGESS LEECH (CONT'D)

Though she may do just as well...

Burgess begins to trudge over to the Siren. The Guide calls after him.

GUIDE

Burgess! Don't go near her! She's a siren! A creature designed to seduce and dismantle men!

Burgess ignores him and continues to walk.

Burgess approaches the Siren.

BURGESS LEECH

Excuse me, Miss.

SIREN

(seductively, erotic)
Hello, Burgess Leech...

BURGESS LEECH

Oh, you know me?

SIREN

Only by reputation...

Burgess reacts comically to this statement.

BURGESS LEECH
(blushing)
Well, you know--

SIREN
Tell me, my Burgess, what is it you
desire? Anything and I'll make it
come true...

BURGESS LEECH
Well, I'd like to start off with
some light petting, some name
calling, then maybe you can step on
my balls.

The Siren immediately breaks her sexual character and is startled by what Burgess is requesting.

BURGESS LEECH (CONT'D)
You're Greek, so I'm assuming anal
is included.

SIREN
Uhhh...

BURGESS LEECH
You know, maybe choke me a little
bit, tell me I'm scum and then hold
me afterward while I cry.

The Siren is speechless, looking visibly off-put.

BURGESS LEECH (CONT'D)
How much for an hour?

Suddenly the Siren, enraged, slaps Burgess across the face. He briefly looks stunned, but then makes a face of pleasure.

BURGESS LEECH (CONT'D)
Yes! Like that!

The Guide approaches and begins to drag Burgess away by the arm.

GUIDE
Come, Burgess or we'll be late
visiting your widow. She's
accepting an award on your behalf.

BURGESS LEECH
Oh, great...and who's she fucking?
My Mother?

(MORE)

BURGESS LEECH (CONT'D)
 Maybe she's using the strap-on I
 bought her for International
 Women's Day-- wait, what award?

23 EXT. NON-SPECIFIC LOCATION - AMBIGUOUS TIME

23

Burgess and the Guide walk into a building.

GUIDE

Your novel has been honored with
 several awards since its
 publication, your wife attending
 each and every ceremony and even
 going as far as to deliver an
 acceptance speech...

BURGESS LEECH

I think I'm going to be sick.

24 INT. AWARD CEREMONY ROOM (THEATER) - AMBIGUOUS TIME

24

Burgess' WIDOW stands at a podium and speaks to an unseen
 audience.

Burgess and the Guide stand beside her, listening to her
 acceptance speech.

WIDOW

(to audience)

If Burgess were here to accept this
 award, he'd be at a loss of words.

BURGESS LEECH

(to Widow, who is unable
 to hear)

But I have a few words for you; if
 I were alive I'd kill you.

WIDOW

(to audience)

Marriage is a partnership.

BURGESS LEECH

More like a dictatorship.

WIDOW

(to audience)

I tried to help Burgess in his
 life's quest to be an artist, which
 is customarily a very lonely and
 difficult road.

BURGESS LEECH

If they only knew! Even in death
you're a pain in the ass!

WIDOW

He often called me his muse and the
basis of every great female
character he'd ever written.

BURGESS LEECH

You were a cunt. You were always a
cunt.

GUIDE

(to Burgess)

Why did you marry her in the first
place?

BURGESS LEECH

(to Guide)

What do you mean, why did I marry
her? I married her for the right
reason. I didn't want to die alone.

WIDOW

I feel this award is mine as much
as it is Burgess' and I will
cherish it as I know he would have.
Thank you.

Burgess angrily reacts.

The audience erupts into applause.

25

I/E. NON-SPECIFIC LOCATION - AMBIGUOUS TIME

25

Burgess sits with head slouched, visibly depressed, murmuring
to himself. His Guide sits beside him.

BURGESS LEECH

(to Guide)

My legacy is ruined. These people,
they've taken it and skewed it
unrecognizably.

GUIDE

But without them you wouldn't have
even had a legacy.

BURGESS LEECH

Better to not have one at all than
one that's not truly yours. I feel
like killing myself all over again.

(MORE)

BURGESS LEECH (CONT'D)

You wouldn't happen to have a concealed weapons permit?

GUIDE

I've been meaning to ask you. Why did you shoot yourself? A little cliché for a writer, isn't it? You're not Hemingway.

BURGESS LEECH

It wasn't my first choice. I planned on hanging myself, but I've got this fetish called auto-erotic affixation. It's where you--

GUIDE

I know what it is.

BURGESS LEECH

Yeah, well, I've heard you can maintain an erection up to four hours after dying. I didn't want anyone to find me like that. I could just hear my wife now...

26 INT. HOTEL ROOM - DAY

26

Burgess' lifeless body hangs. A POLICE OFFICER escorts his Widow into the room to identify the body. She takes one look at him and says:

WIDOW

Sure, now he gets one.

27 I/E. - NON-DESCRIPT OUTDOOR LOCATION - AMBIGUOUS TIME

27

Burgess and the Guide continue their conversation.

BURGESS LEECH

She would capitalize on my demise even more than she already has.

GUIDE

It's the American way, Burgess. Climb over everyone, even when their bodies go limp.

BURGESS LEECH

The book wasn't even published based upon its own merit. It was the result of a freak accident.

(MORE)

BURGESS LEECH (CONT'D)

That's all anyone values, controversy and fleeting tabloid gossip. (long pause) ...A few years ago, before I died, I visited Paris. A lifelong dream. And one day I flipped on the television. You know what was on? "Wings of Desire," the Wim Wenders film. It was just on a regular station, playing in the middle of the afternoon. In contrast, turn on a television in America and you're lucky not to find a reality show about burned-out celebrities diving into pools. Did you know there's a show dedicated entirely to wealthy hillbillies who invented the fabricated duck call? You know that duck thing hunters blow into? I don't know why it's a show, I guess to give the gun-lovers something to masturbate to. Have you seen it?

GUIDE

No, the only channel we get here is Fox News.

Burgess is appalled.

GUIDE (CONT'D)

I'm kidding.

Burgess is relieved.

BURGESS LEECH

I don't know, art is respected in Europe, it's considered vital. I think they have it right over there. (short pause) Did you hear some right-wing, backward wack-job in Alabama removed the word "Nigger" and replaced it with "Slave" in a new edition of Huckleberry Finn? This is the kind of society we're living in. The religious right is so far up their own asses, they don't realize they're defeating the entire purpose of the book and are, in essence, calling Mark Twain a racist. Slave isn't synonymous with Nigger, they don't mean the same thing. They're tampering with art.

(MORE)

BURGESS LEECH (CONT'D)

And good art, art with the power to do good in the world. Why don't they focus their energy on closing down the modern art wing at the Metropolitan or rounding up every performance artist and shooting them? But these are the same sub-mental bible thumpers that call the president a communist *and* a fascist. That's like saying you're both a Celtics and a Lakers fan. It doesn't make sense.

The Guide is amused by this.

GUIDE

I would have liked to read your book, Burgess.

BURGESS LEECH

Nah. To tell you the truth... it wasn't very good.

The Guide is again amused and lets out a smirk.

GUIDE

Come. We have one more person to visit.

28

INT. NON-SPECIFIC LOCATION - AMBIGUOUS TIME

28

A lovely 30-something woman is sitting beside a REPORTER, conducting an interview. The woman is Burgess' estranged daughter ROXANNE.

Burgess and the Guide stand and watch the interview take place.

BURGESS LEECH

(to Guide)

Is that?

GUIDE

Roxanne. Your daughter.

BURGESS LEECH

(melancholy)

I haven't seen her since she was a little girl.

REPORTER

(to Roxanne)

Thank you for meeting me, though I must confess it wasn't easy tracking you down.

ROXANNE

I was a bit hesitant when I received your call.

REPORTER

I understand. As you know, I'm writing a book on your father's life, the unusual circumstances that surrounded his death and the posthumous publishing of his acclaimed novel.

ROXANNE

There's not much I can tell you. I never really knew my father.

REPORTER

Yes, you were the daughter of Burgess and his second wife, Meredith.

ROXANNE

Yes.

REPORTER

Well, just tell me any information about him that you can remember.

Roxanne, visibly melancholy, thinks deeply before speaking.

ROXANNE

He was an unhappy man. I remember even as a little girl seeing the anguish on his face. He attempted to be sweet to me, but I think he felt too rotten inside to make it convincing...

Bitterness is evident in Roxanne's voice. The Reporter intently listens to her words, his face saddening as she continues.

ROXANNE (CONT'D)

He was terrible to my mother, or perhaps I should say they were terrible to one another.

Burgess listens without speaking. The Guide looks toward Burgess, seeing that his daughter's harsh and honest words are sinking in.

ROXANNE (CONT'D)

I don't think they wanted to be married to each other from day one... I remember him writing a lot, spending most of his time in front of his typewriter, surrounded in a cloud of cigarette smoke. I don't know if it was actually like that or if that's just my imagination romanticizing it... I actually can only recall one fond memory with my father and that was when he took me to see peacocks. There was a farm near our house and he drove me up there and let me play. It's such a beautiful memory and I'm glad I have it.

BURGESS LEECH

I forgot about that...

ROXANNE

But mostly I feel pity for him. It was an empty life and it ended in such an ugly way. That's why I've tried to avoid getting caught up in what happened with his book, the wealth and fame. I only agreed to do this interview so that finally, something that's true could be said about him.

Burgess approaches Roxanne, sits beside her and strokes her face. She brushes it off as if it were a strand of hair.

ROXANNE (CONT'D)

The one thing I wish is that I hadn't have had that short time with him before he left, that he had never been around at all. That way I wouldn't have had anything to miss.

Burgess is visibly emotional. His eyes are puffy and watering.

29

EXT. NON-DESCRIPT OUTDOOR LOCATION - DAY

29

A YOUNG ROXANNE is shown playing among many beautiful peacocks. Burgess and the Guide watch her do so.

Burgess then turns to the Guide.

BURGESS LEECH

Ok, that's enough. No more. I've learned my lesson. Dickens was right.

GUIDE

I'm afraid it's not as simple as all that.

BURGESS LEECH

Well, I'm going to be able to go back, right? I'm going to wake up and get another chance?

GUIDE

No, Burgess.

BURGESS LEECH

(alarmed)

What do you mean? I need to fix this.

GUIDE

This isn't a story. You're dead and there's no way you can go back.

BURGESS LEECH

Well, what about this in-between place? Why take me to see all these people? What about Heaven and God?

GUIDE

There is no God... no Devil, no Heaven, no Hell.

Burgess processes this heavy information.

BURGESS LEECH

What is all this if there's no Heaven?

GUIDE

The afterlife is dictated by our subconscious.

(MORE)

GUIDE (CONT'D)

If we've lived a thoughtful life, a charitable life of minimal regret, then we get to enjoy peace and solace when we die, but if our minds are uneasy, if we feel resentment, pain, remorse, guilt and regret... we punish ourselves accordingly... We are our own judges Burgess and all we have to judge is the life we've lead.

Burgess is visibly upset and saddened by the Guide's words.

GUIDE (CONT'D)

You seem upset.

BURGESS LEECH

I never thought I'd be so disappointed about being right. I spent my whole life wanting to believe in God, to feel that comfort, but something told me it was too convenient an explanation for the painful messiness of existence.

GUIDE

Well, technically, you still can't be sure there isn't a God. All you've done is die and that doesn't prove anything. Your mind only knows what it knows and nothing more.

BURGESS LEECH

So, we're inside my subconscious?

GUIDE

I won't be cryptic with you this time, yes.

BURGESS LEECH

That's why all these places have felt familiar...

GUIDE

You've been to all of them before.

BURGESS LEECH

This place. It's where I took Roxanne when she was a kid. And the chapel...

GUIDE

Where you left the love of your
life at the alter...

30 INT. NON-SPECIFIC LOCATION (CHAPEL) - AMBIGUOUS TIME 30

The same Young Bride stands on the alter, crying heavily into
her hands.

31 EXT. NON-DESCRIPT OUTDOOR LOCATION - DAY 31

Conversation continues.

GUIDE

Why'd you do it?

BURGESS LEECH

(innocently)

I was afraid.

GUIDE

What were you afraid of?

BURGESS LEECH

She wasn't like my other wives, she
really loved me... How did you know
about her?

GUIDE

I know everything you know and her
and Roxanne are what you think
about most, though you do your best
to hide it. They're the two great
losses of your life, the things
that made you the man you are...or
were, I should say.

Burgess is emotionally devastated.

GUIDE (CONT'D)

Do you think you truly learned your
lesson?

BURGESS LEECH

Sure, but what good is it if I
can't go back?

The Guide shrugs.

GUIDE

Well, it appears my work here is
done.

BURGESS LEECH

Wait, you can't go. What about me?
Where am I going to end up?

32 INT. DANCE HALL - AMBIGUOUS TIME

32

A dance hall/Hell-like setting has a dance in full swing. Chained people and demons are lined up around the dance floor cheering on the dancers in the center of the floor as they engage in a boisterous swing dance.

The atmosphere is slightly otherworldly and a band plays at the front of the room.

BURGESS LEECH

(to Guide)

What is this place?

GUIDE

Welcome to your own personal Hell.

Burgess stumbles around in a daze. He looks into the dancing crowd and sees familiar faces.

BURGESS LEECH

It's true, I never like dancing,
but-- Hey, there's my agent... And
Roxanne.

Roxanne is shown dancing.

BURGESS LEECH (CONT'D)

And there's the little kid I used
to bully in grade school.

The LITTLE KID is shown chained on the outskirts of the dance floor.

GUIDE

Your ex-wives are here, too.
Everyone you've ever hurt.

BURGESS LEECH

But they all look so happy to see
me.

GUIDE

Sure, they're all here because of
you...

Burgess sees his Father who is dressed up like Satan surrounded by beautiful women.

BURGESS LEECH
Dad? Is that you? I always knew you
were the Devil.

The Father lets out a big, belly laugh.

BURGESS LEECH (CONT'D)
(to Father)
It's good to see you.

Burgess then turns to the Guide.

BURGESS LEECH (CONT'D)
(to Guide)
Hey, if this is all in my
subconscious, it means that I must
have known you when I was alive,
but I can't remember who you are.

GUIDE
Don't you recognize me, Burgess?
It's me, the protagonist from your
very first novel.

Burgess thinks to himself.

BURGESS LEECH
Emeric Neettlebaum? Is that you?

GUIDE
Yeah!

BURGESS LEECH
Boy, I haven't thought about you in
years. Your name is terrible, so
unbelievable. What was I thinking?

GUIDE
No more unbelievable than Burgess
Leech.

The dancing continues.

BURGESS LEECH
So what do I do now?

GUIDE
It's up to you. You can either stay
here and look on or join in and
dance.

Roxanne approaches Burgess, smiles and reaches out her hands.

Burgess hesitates for a moment, but then takes her hands and joins in on the dance.

Everyone is shown dancing. The band plays. A patron limbo dances beneath the extruded intestines of two undead demons. Everyone is laughing and having a good time.

The dancing continues indefinitely as the music swells up.

CUT TO BLACK.