

THE LAST WORD

by

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The concept is Phil's fault

EXT. SUBURBAN NEIGHBORHOOD - DAY

The sun rises on a new day. The orange and red leaves blow off the trees and scatter on the ground. A row of tract housing stands identically behind the baring trees.

INT. CRAVEN HOUSE - DAY

MICHAEL CRAVEN, a man of about 50 with thinning hair, sits reading the morning paper at the kitchen table. His wife REBECCA, also around 50 with salt and pepper hair, sets a plate of sausage and eggs before him.

He looks at the plate and sets his paper down.

MICHAEL

Thank you, Rebecca. It looks good.

REBECCA

You're welcome.

They quietly take bites of their breakfast. Rebecca glances at Michael for a moment.

REBECCA

Honey?

MICHAEL

What is it?

REBECCA

The neighborhood association was talking about having another block party at the last meeting.

MICHAEL

What about it?

REBECCA

Well, they had asked if we might be able to participate this time.

Michael sighs.

REBECCA

Come on, it's only once a year.

MICHAEL

But it's all those people. I can't handle them all coming through here. You know I don't like big gatherings like that.

REBECCA

And I've always adored your quiet nature, but we're part of this neighborhood. I don't ask you to go to the meetings, but would you do this for me?

Michael sighs.

REBECCA

Please?

MICHAEL

When is it?

REBECCA

This Saturday.

MICHAEL

How long do I have to decide?

REBECCA

Thursday?

MICHAEL

Three days.

REBECCA

Think about it?

MICHAEL

I'll think about it.

REBECCA

Then I won't bug you about it again until Thursday.

MICHAEL

Thank you.

They eat a few more quiet bites.

REBECCA
I really want to.

MICHAEL
It's not Thursday yet.

He looks over to her with a smile. She smiles back.

REBECCA
Sorry.

They continue with their breakfast.

EXT. FUNERAL HOME - DAY

A modest building whose architecture blends neatly into the surrounding buildings. Its neatly manicured lawns stretch behind the building into a large cemetery. A sign in the front lawn reads: "CRAVEN & SKEERT FUNERAL HOME".

INT. FUNERAL HOME - DAY

Michael walks into the back office of the home picks up a STACK OF FOLDERS. Behind him, JENNY HOPPER, a girl of about 20 with more energy than a three year old, bounds into the office.

JENNY
Good morning, Mr. Craven.

MICHAEL
Good morning, Jenny.

JENNY
We had one come in this morning.

MICHAEL
(re: the folders)
Is it one of these?

JENNY
No, the family is still here. They wanted to talk to you.

MICHAEL

Talk to me?

JENNY

To make sure their wishes were clear, they said.

MICHAEL

All right. Where is the deceased?

JENNY

In the preparation room.

MICHAEL

Good girl. I'll talk to them.

He places the folders back on the desk and follows Jenny

INTO THE FRONT OFFICE

where KENNETH HARGROVE stands looking out the front window, his back to Michael and Jenny. Jenny walks up to him and touches his sleeve.

JENNY

Sir?

He turns to her. He would look around 34, but for his bloodshot eyes, like a man who has been up crying for a week.

JENNY

Mr. Hargrove, this is Michael Craven, one of the owners.

He looks at Michael. Michael extends a hand.

MICHAEL

I'm very sorry for your lo-

Kenneth grabs Michael in a big embrace and whimpers for a moment. Michael stands stunned, his arms out. He gingerly pats Kenneth's back. Kenneth stands back up and snuffles.

KENNETH

I'm sorry, but it's been a rough couple of days. Kenneth Hargrove.

MICHAEL

What can I do for you, Mr. Hargrove?

KENNETH

(through sobs)

My father passed of heart failure last night. My mother is a mess, or she'd've come herself. I just need to arrange for his interment.

MICHAEL

Yes, sir, please take a seat. Whatever his wishes are, we will strive to fulfill them.

KENNETH

Thank you. My father was a good man. He took care of his family. He gave at the church. He even volunteered. You would never know a better man.

Kenneth sniffles. Jenny hands Kenneth a box of Kleenex. Kenneth blows his nose.

KENNETH

I'm sorry.

MICHAEL

Please, take your time.

KENNETH

Like I said, there was never a better man that walked this earth other than Jesus himself. I'll be bringing his best suit and we just want him to look peaceful - like he's sleeping and waiting for his Lord to pick him up.

MICHAEL

Of course, we'll take care of everything. Jenny will show you some of our options for his funeral service and interment.

KENNETH

Thank you.

Michael stands and walks to Jenny. They step outside the front office. She hands him a sheet of paper.

MICHAEL

This his?

JENNY

Yes.

MICHAEL

Will you be able to handle him while I check on his father?

JENNY

No problem, Mr. Craven.

Michael walks away from her, looking at the sheet of paper. He chuckles. Jenny turns to him.

JENNY

What is it?

Michael turns to her.

MICHAEL

I'm sorry, it's the name. Frederick Hargrove.

JENNY

What's funny about it?

MICHAEL

It's the name of a guy who used to beat the snot out of me in middle school. It'd be funny if it were the same guy.

JENNY

I doubt it is.

MICHAEL

Me too. Take good care of him.

She waves as he walks out of the public area of the home and
INTO THE PREPARATION ROOM

where a table sits in the middle of the room with a body on it,
covered with a sheet. Michael sets the paper down on a counter
and walks over to the table.

MICHAEL

All right, Mr. Hargrove, let's
have a look at you.

Michael pulls down the sheet to reveal the FACE OF FREDERICK
HARGROVE, a man of exactly Michael's age. Michael looks like
someone shot him in the back of the head.

EXT. PLAYGROUND - DAY (FLASHBACK)

YOUNG FREDERICK HARGROVE, age 10 and a bully, kicks a kid,
huddled on the ground.

FREDERICK

Come on, punk, what's them matter?
Don't you wanna fight me?

The huddles kid whimpers. Frederick kicks him again.

FREDERICK

I can't hear you!

The kid looks up. It is MICHAEL CRAVEN, also 10. His face is
bloodied and tear-streaked.

MICHAEL

I said, I don't want to.

Michael tries to run away, but Frederick pushes him into the
mud. He laughs like a maniac.

FREDERICK

Look everyone! Craven's a craven.

As young Michael looks around, suddenly a few kids turns into a
throng and them a mob all chanting:

KIDS

Craven's a craven! Craven's a craven!
Craven's a craven! Craven's a craven!

Michael puts his hands over his ears and huddles on the ground again.

INT. CRAVEN HOUSE - NIGHT

Michael sits in his chair, staring off into space. Rebecca walks up behind him.

REBECCA
Are you ok, Michael?

Michael jumps at the sound of her voice. She jumps back.

REBECCA
Hey, what's wrong?

He turns away from her, embarrassed.

MICHAEL
Nothing. It's nothing.

REBECCA
Give me some credit. After twenty-five years, I can read you well enough to know this isn't "nothing."

Michael sighs.

REBECCA
And I'm not taking Mr. Silence.

She sits on the couch and looks at him. He stares at her. She frowns at him comically. He smiles and shakes his head.

MICHAEL
Really, it's just something at work.

REBECCA
Yes, I know your job kills you, but how bad can a mortician's life be?

MICHAEL

Do you ever run out of dead jokes?

REBECCA

Not as long as you keep paying
for internet access.

MICHAEL

I'm ok.

REBECCA

I'm not taking that.

MICHAEL

Did I ever tell you I got bullied
when I was a kid?

REBECCA

No.

MICHAEL

I didn't think so.

He gets up. She grabs his sleeve.

REBECCA

Now wait a minute, you're not
getting off that easily.

He sighs again. She pulls him to the couch. He sits beside her.
She looks into his eyes.

REBECCA

(gently)

Talk to me.

Michael looks at her for a moment.

MICHAEL

This guy named Fred beat me up
during my sixth through eighth
grade years at Taylor Middle
School. Made my life a living
hell.

REBECCA

Ok. And that has what to do with today?

MICHAEL

I embalmed him this morning.

REBECCA

Seriously?

MICHAEL

Yes, I have to take this guy who destroyed any hope I had of a normal life and make him look good for his last hurrah! If I had to look over my life and find one person who made me into a mortician of all professions, it was Frederick Hargrove.

REBECCA

This guy did not force you into being who you are.

MICHAEL

He did. I was afraid of him, and as a result, I've been afraid of everyone. I never speak to anyone. I never want to be in front of people. I deal with the dead, because they can't mock me. They can't taunt me with that horrible chant...

He lowers his head and runs his hands through his hair. Rebecca looks at him, concerned.

REBECCA

What did they say?

MICHAEL

Craven's a craven.

He turns to her, angry, tears welling.

MICHAEL

It turns out they were right.

INT. CRAVEN HOUSE - NIGHT

Michael and Rebecca are in bed. She is asleep. He is tossing and turning. He finally settles on his back.

A smile settles across his face.

INT. FUNERAL HOME CHAPEL - DREAM

PASTOR COOPER stands at the lectern. Michael stands beside the closed casket of Frederick. The church is filled to the belfries with people. Michael smiles to himself.

PASTOR COOPER

And so comes to a close the life
of a man who touched everyone he
came into contact with. As his
pastor for over 25 years, I can
say without hesitation he was
the kind of man you wanted to
be your friend.

He looks to Michael, who nods.

PASTOR COOPER

And now, brother Hargrove's body
will be available for a brief
viewing to pay last respects
before he is given to the earth.

Michael smiles and opens the casket. The Pastor gasps. The crowd gasps. Michael smiles. Frederick Hargrove LOOKS LIKE THE JOKER FROM BATMAN, COMPLETE WITH WIDE EYES AND SICKENING SMILE.

MICHAEL

(yelling)

Take that, you old bastard! You
want to ruin my life, I'll ruin
your death! I never forgot you!
Never forgot what you did! Never!
Never! Never!

Michael grabs the side of the casket and throws it off the stand, spilling Frederick's body all over the floor. The women scream. The crowd goes nuts, yelling and making a scene. Michael laughs and laughs until he looks up. The screaming has morphed into cheering.

INT. JERRY SPRINGER STUDIO - DREAM

Michael sits on the stage of "The Jerry Springer Show." The crowd is cheering. JERRY SPRINGER walks down the aisle, holding his microphone and index cards.

JERRY

Today's show is called "You ruined my life." We have with us Michael Craven, a mortician from Colorado who wants to tell someone from his past what they did to him. Who do you want to bring out, Michael?

MICHAEL

Frederick Hargrove. This man bullied me as a child and made me a quiet man, forcing me to live up to my own last name.

JERRY

All right, let's bring out Mr. Frederick Hargrove.

FREDERICK HARGROVE, alive at about 50, walks in from backstage. As he crosses to the stage, Michael jumps up. Frederick scowls at him. A muted argument ensues between them as JERRY'S BOUNCERS hold them off.

They both sit a fair distance each other.

JERRY

Now, Michael, what would you like to say to Frederick?

MICHAEL

What kind of cruelty would lead you to destroy my young life? Don't you know how afraid of everything you made me? Why would you do that?

FREDERICK

That was forty years ago. I moved on. Why can't you?

MICHAEL

Because I'm a mortician. Nothing good came out of what you did to me. Only pain. Only humiliation. Only living every day in the presence of death. You killed me inside, so I can only handle the dead on the outside.

DR. PHIL (O.S.)

Who talks like that? Are you listening to yourself?

Michael's eyes widen.

INT. DR. PHIL STUDIO - DREAM

Michael finds himself with DR. PHIL on his left and Frederick on his right.

DR. PHIL

Do you really believe this man shaped you whole life?

MICHAEL

Some of it.

DR. PHIL

Let's deal with that. You say that because he bullied you, you went into embalming dead people.

MICHAEL

I am afraid of everyone. I can't deal with people.

DR. PHIL

You need to get past that and try to figure out what good may have come out of this. Frederick, what about you? Did anything good come out of your bullying?

FREDERICK

Well, I am not proud of that time of my life, but after middle school, I was sent away for awhile to a military school. That's why I didn't come around anymore. The regimented environment cleaned me up and made me think of others. I met my wife because of it.

DR. PHIL

Good. That's good. Now, Michael, what about you?

MICHAEL

I went through school, and decided since I couldn't deal with people-

DR. PHIL

Let's try something more specific. How did you meet your wife?

Michael looks away from Phil.

INSERT MONTAGE

Michael and Rebecca, 30 years younger

- A) dancing in a gym
- B) eating ice cream in a soda bar
- C) cheering at a football game
- D) Michael graduates as Rebecca looks on. He smiles and waves to her.

END MONTAGE

Dr. Phil looks at Michael, staring off into space.

DR. PHIL

Hello? Earth to Michael.

Michael's eyes brighten. His mouth opens in quiet disbelief.

MICHAEL

(quietly)

I met her at school...

END DREAM

INT. CRAVEN HOUSE - NIGHT

Michael's eyes shoot open.

MICHAEL

Oh, my god...

INT. CRAVEN HOUSE - DAY

Rebecca stands in the kitchen working on breakfast. Michael walks out and stands in the doorway. She turns to him.

REBECCA

Good morning.

She seems to wait for a response but none comes. She looks to him.

REBECCA

Are you ok? Still fretting about work?

MICHAEL

No. I just wanted to tell you.

REBECCA

What?

MICHAEL

Saturday is fine.

REBECCA

Really? Yay!

She claps briefly and then runs over to him and throws her arms around his neck. He hugs her back and smiles.

INT. FUNERAL HOME - DAY

Michael walks up to Frederick's body. He looks at it for some time. He reaches over and takes his tray of makeup. He smiles and begins his work.

INT. FUNERAL HOME CHAPEL - DAY

MOURNERS file past Michael, who stands at the entrance to the Chapel along with Jenny. They are both dressed to the nine's. Behind Michael, Frederick's body rests in his casket, looking almost alive.

A woman of about 50 walks up to the casket. She lovingly touches Frederick's face, a tissue in her opposite hand. This is LORETTA HARGROVE. Her daughter KATHERINE stands with her along with Kenneth.

LORETTA

He looks so good. Doesn't he look good, Katherine?

KATHERINE

He really does, mom.

LORETTA

Almost like he could wake up and say something smart, like he always did.

Katherine smiles through her tears. Loretta wipes her eyes with her tissue. She looks up and sees Michael. She walks up to him.

LORETTA

Thank you.

MICHAEL

You're welcome. I'm very sorry for your loss.

LORETTA

Did you know him?

Michael looks at her quietly for a moment, and then smiles.

MICHAEL

Yes. A long time ago when we were kids.

LORETTA

Really? Were you friends?

MICHAEL

No, we didn't run in the same circles, but even so, he was still ... influential.

Loretta looks at him, as if expecting more.

MICHAEL

I have him to thank for more than I could put into words.

Loretta smiles and wipes her eyes again.

LORETTA

Thank you.

KATHERINE

Thank you.

Katherine leads Loretta out of the chapel, followed by Kenneth. Michael walks over to Frederick's casket and looks down at him. He smiles.

MICHAEL

(to Frederick)

Thank you.

He closes the lid.

THE END.