

# **Walking On Bones**

by

Carol Wolf

Carol Wolf  
P.O. Box 207  
O'Neals, CA 93645  
(559) 642-3387

Representation:  
Susan Gurman  
The Susan Gurman Agency  
865 West End Ave. #15A  
New York, NY 10025-8403  
(212) 749-4618

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**Note:** *Walking On Bones* is a one-man show based on the technique developed by Everett Quinton whereby one actor plays multiple characters in a single scene. All eleven characters are to be played by the one actor.

**Setting Note:** All environments in Tyler's journey are made by him as he reaches them, by adjusting the furniture in the room.

**Walking On Bones**

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(Lights up on a large, darkly-paneled room in an expensive private mental hospital. The room is crowded with old, scarred, sturdy furniture, including a desk, several chairs, bookcases with stuff instead of books, and a narrow, institutional bed. Many years' worth of abandoned hobbies lie in strata, all over the room)

(At the desk lit by a desk lamp, Tyler, dressed in a white lab coat over his hospital clothes, dictates into a tape recorder)

TYLER

February. The date. Tuesday. The time. Doctor Tyler makes his report.

You are a bunch of ASSHOLES. A. S. S. H. O. L. E. S. Underline that. You have lost a patient. You lost a patient right under your faces and you don't even know it. I have to tell you. All right. Listen carefully.

Space. No. Paragraph. Period.

The patient. John. John Thorne. That's the name on the door, the name on the chart, the name on the wristband. Patient number one-oh-two-three. He's on my case load. And this is what I find.

John.

(The actor becomes John, sitting quite still in a chair. Then he becomes Tyler again and continues.)

Patient one-oh-two-three, in room twenty-three, presenting – what. A mild delusion. A simple false impression. A complaint. That's all. He complains that there are flies in his room. He would like them removed. Or killed. Removed or killed.

There are no flies in his room. We know that. There's nothing wrong with us. We know that. There's nothing wrong with him. He thinks there are flies in his room. Well I can fix that.

John. I'm Doctor Tyler. How are you. I understand you have something you want to say to me about your room. You have some problem with your room. I'm here to help you. So, tell me.

(He becomes John. John just sits there)

If there's something wrong with your room, tell me today. Your mother is coming to see you tomorrow.

JOHN  
It doesn't matter. I'm used to them.

TYLER  
You're used to them.

JOHN  
(Bats a fly)  
The flies. You get used to them.

TYLER  
But what about your mother?

(John shrugs)  
She isn't going to like seeing you in a room with a bunch of flies. This is a private room.

(John shrugs)  
Well we don't want you telling her. What do you say, John. What are you going to tell your mother.

(John shrugs)  
JOHN  
It's okay. She isn't my mother.

TYLER  
(Consults a clipboard)  
Mrs. Thorne. Coming to visit. Tomorrow. Patient one-oh-two-three. John Thorne.

JOHN  
She isn't my mother. She's John's mother.

TYLER  
Oh she's John's mother. What does it say on your wristband.

JOHN  
One. Oh. Two. Three.

TYLER  
That's right. John Thorne.

JOHN  
He left me this. He gave me this when he left.

TYLER  
John is gone? John Thorne is actually gone? When did this happen?

(John shrugs. Tyler speaks into the tape recorder)

TYLER (cont.)

You can see we have a problem here. Slight delusions. Mild complaints. Masking – a much bigger problem. He doesn't think he's John Thorne! Nobody has noticed this? Therapy, treatment, group sessions. Nobody has noticed that this patient is an impostor, until I came on the job. Me. Doctor Tyler.

Well his mother is going to notice!

(To John)

Where is John Thorne?

JOHN

I don't know.

TYLER

We can't have him talking like this.

(Tyler begins to assemble, from various stuff in the room, a box with numerous cables, clips, blinking lights, and a dial)

My work on the mind vector center transformer responder has been ridiculed ignored disregarded by my colleagues because my premise that an understanding of mild delusions can be entered in to, can be reached, their delusions can be adjusted, they can be fixed. Because you just don't want me to be right. Assholes!

John. You are suffering from a mild delusion. You think you are not the person who is supposed to be living in this room. One oh two three. You think your mother is not your mother. Not uncommon. And you think, occasionally, that there are flies in your room. I don't see things that way. I am the doctor. You are the patient. I can help you to see things the way I do. And then you'll be better, won't you? Wouldn't you like to be better? Good. Just put this on.

(Tyler clips some cables to his head)

And I'll put this on. Just put this on, and push this button. All right? Just put it on. That's right. And when you're ready, push that button right there.

JOHN

All right.

(John takes his end of the cables and winds them around himself variously and clips them on. When he is suitably decked he takes up the dial,

and pushes the button. Nothing happens. John shrugs, bats away at a fly)

(Tyler hits the floor, retching)

TYLER

Oh my God. Oh my God. How can you stand it? How can you stand that smell? What is it? Agh –

(He retches again)

JOHN

I'm used to it. I just don't like the flies.

TYLER

What is that? It's – God it's buzzing. It's moving. It's –

JOHN

That's where the flies come from.

TYLER

It's – it's alive.

JOHN

That's just the flies. Don't – don't go by there. Leave them alone. Or they'll be all over us. I never go over by there.

TYLER

What – are they eating? What is that? God. The smell. Oh God.

(He hits the button. For him the smell is gone. He gasps for breath, grabs the recorder:)

If ordinary pest prevention measures are not able to deal with an infestation of this magnitude, then some more comprehensible removal agency must come and clean this room. Before his mother gets here!

(He finds a piece of cloth, ties it around his face, reattaches himself to the box and hits the button. He recoils at the smell)

Oh...

(Then:)

John. John, if you are not John Thorne, then who are you?

JOHN

I'm nobody.

TYLER

That isn't possible. Where are you from? Why are you locked up in this room in John's place? Who are you?

JOHN

I came when John went away.

TYLER

Where did he go?

(John looks toward where the flies are massed)

Why?

JOHN

He had to. And I had to stay.

TYLER

Who are you.

JOHN

Nobody. I'm the paper man. I just stay.

TYLER

Yeah? Well what do you think's going to happen tomorrow when John Thorne's mother comes here to look for him? What are you going to say?

JOHN

He's not here.

TYLER

You think she'll just go away? She'll want to see her son. Where is he?

JOHN

She can't. I think he's dead.

TYLER

Dead.

JOHN

He didn't come back. He went –

(He indicates the direction)

– and he didn't come back. He's dead.

TYLER

Let's go find him.

(Goes to grab him and go; John avoids him)

JOHN

No.

TYLER

We can't just let her find you here. You know what she's going to think don't you?

JOHN

I didn't kill him. I don't know where he is, but I didn't kill him.

TYLER

We have to find him and bring him back. He just needs to sit here for one day, one day.

JOHN

What if he's dead?

TYLER

He just has to sit here. She won't notice that. But we have to find him. Come on.

(Tyler switches the button. He starts gathering supplies from the stuff in the room as he talks into the tape recorder)

Continuation of the report by Doctor Tyler. Transformation derogation experiment is successful. I will return to report my findings. If I don't return. I did not kill John Thorne. He's only missing. And we're going to bring him back. Patient one-oh-two-three is in my custody. Over and out.

(He removes the tape, leaves it in a prominent place in the room. Puts in another tape)

(He hooks himself up, presses the switch, and reels again at the smell)

Oh God. John. Come on. Let's go. Which way.

(John indicates the direction and they start toward the pile which is the source of the flies. Tyler speaks into the tape recorder)

Report of the journey. We're starting off. I am marking the source of the pollution in room twenty-three, so if I don't return, at least the flies can be dealt with.

(He sets a stick with a piece of cloth tied to the end into the pile that is the source of the flies)

JOHN

No – no – don't do that – agh –

(John takes a dive as the flies swarm away from the disturbance. There are clouds of them)

TYLER

It's okay – it's okay –

JOHN

I hate them. I hate them –

TYLER

Who's that? John! Who's that!

JOHN

No....

(The Anchor Man rises up and sits on the pile. He takes a fistful of meat from the pile and stuffs it into his mouth.)

ANCHOR

I would advise you not to go any farther. I would advise you, but I'm eating. Believe me, past this, it gets much worse. It gets really ugly. Mm.

(He takes another fistful from the pile, brushes off the flies, crams it into his mouth)

I've seen the bodies carried out. You wouldn't want to look at them.

TYLER

We're looking for someone.

ANCHOR

So am I. I'm looking for the guy who will pay me fifty million bucks a year for talking. I can do the talking. I just haven't found the guy.

TYLER

Did John Thorne go by here?

ANCHOR

Never heard of him. No one goes by here. The bodies just wash up here and stay. They don't ever have names. Excuse me while I fart.

(He farts enormously)

Ah.

(Tyler reels from the stench, retches)

TYLER

Oh – God.

(John waves a fly away)

JOHN

You get used to it.

ANCHOR

Can't help it. It's because of my diet.

(He rips up another handful of meat from the pile, brushes away the flies)

Shoo. Shoo fly shoo. Don't bother me. Ew. Maggots. Don't come any closer. It's a jungle out there. Rivers of blood. Pain. Dismemberment. Bad weather. And accidents always happen.

TYLER

Shut up. John, don't listen to him.

ANCHOR

I'm giving you the facts. Tonight two men were murdered on the charge of trespassing while breaking in to the lovely home of beautiful blond socialite celebrity –

(Tyler gets a TV clicker from his bag of supplies)

TYLER

Shut up!

(He clicks. The Anchor Man vanishes)

He wasn't real. Nothing he said was real. It's dark in there.

(He gets out a flashlight, turns it on)

Ready?

(He speaks into the tape recorder)

Doctor Tyler reporting. We're going in. Stand by for further bulletins. John. Come on.

(He starts to climb over the pile that is crawling with flies and maggots. John follows, brushing away flies)

Ew. Ow. What is this stuff? Don't worry, John, it's only a little further –

(Shark tackles him off the pile, holds him on the ground)

SHARK

Put out that light. Asshole. You want to get us all killed? What are you guys doing here? This is no place for civilians. Sh!

(He listens. He has a stick that he handles like a gun)

SHARK (cont.)

All right. When I give the word, you guys go back the way you came. All the way. And stay down. Crawl. You hear me?

TYLER

We can't go back.

SHARK

Shut up. Shut up shut up.

TYLER

We have to find John. John Thorne. We heard – he came this way, didn't he. We have to bring him back.

SHARK

What the hell do you want to do that for. He's gone. Let him go. For Chrissake don't you know by now we can't save em all?

TYLER

You know where he is.

SHARK

He's gone. Let him rest in peace. He's earned it, don't you think.

TYLER

He has to come back. His mother's coming tomorrow. She's going to want to see him. Him, not some paper man stuck in his place.

SHARK

Fuck.

TYLER

You know where he is.

SHARK

They got him. They got him in there. Look, I can take you part of the way. But I don't cross the River of Blood, that's not my territory. I can take you that far.

TYLER

The River of Blood? That's where John is?

JOHN

(Starts rocking)

Oh no. Oh no. I'm not going by there. You can't make me –

TYLER

Shut up! Shut up!

SHARK

Shut up both of you or I'll leave you right now and the Han can have you, and eat you too for all I care. You're meat if you don't know the jungle. Just meat.

TYLER

The Han? What's the Han?

SHARK

Keep your voice down or you'll find out. They're out there. They spot you they flatten you, that's all. You stick with me or you've had it. I've been in this jungle fifteen years. I seen more guys go down than you'll ever believe, pieces broken off, bloody, everything. I'll never get back now.

JOHN

You can – you can come back with us.

SHARK

Yeah? Right. Where would they put me. I stink. The blood gets in your shoes you can never get it off. People can smell it on me. That's why they left me behind. Cause I know. What can happen. It can happen to you. Come on. Follow me. Come on!

TYLER

Where we going?

SHARK

We can't stay here. They come here every night. This is where the dead wash up, they check and make sure. They check and see if there's any parts they can use. We don't want to be here. Come on. Form a line. Follow me. No noise. Keep down. Fuckin A, you want to live or you want to die? Or you want to just get hurt.

(Tyler, following Shark, speaks into his tape recorder)

TYLER

Doctor Tyler reporting. Continued. We made seven miles tonight, and then made camp in what seems to be a deserted village. Our escort, who calls himself Shark, says the Han destroyed the village years ago, and no one has dared to return. Which, he says, is good for us. We broke out the MREs.

(He takes a cheese and cracker snack box out of his bag and eats during the following)

John shared some food he'd stolen from the cafeteria. Shark told us what he knew about John.

SHARK

Yeah I knew him. He wanted to fight the Han. Keener little son of a bitch you'd never hope to find. He wanted to fight the Han all day, and all night too. He wasn't as strong as he thought, that's what happened. That's what always happens. You never think you're gonna get it, and then you do.

JOHN

What – what happened to him.

SHARK

It was night. We heard the Han had made camp in a clearing ahead of our position. We needed a diversion and John volunteered. I didn't see him get it. I saw him afterwards. They'd ripped out his heart. Just ripped it out and left him there, like a pile of rags. He looked like a rag, lying there. Later when I looked, they'd taken that too.

That was a bad night. I was in charge of the withdrawal, seeing everybody got out. I kept waiting and waiting for John, thinking he'd come.

TYLER

You said he was dead. That they got him.

SHARK

I thought, maybe he'd pull himself together.

TYLER

You said you saw him dead.

SHARK

He'd lost his heart. What's the matter with you, man? Didn't you hear me? A man doesn't need a heart.

JOHN

Yes he does. Yes he does, if he's gonna see his mother.

TYLER

Shut up both of you, shut up, this is fucked. You are crazy. You said John was dead.

(To his tape recorder)

These guys are crazy.

SHARK

I don't like losin em. It's not my job to lose em, it's my job to see they get home. I waited for John too long. They went without me. I been here ever since. Don't you look at me and pity me. You're going to have enough trouble just keeping alive.

TYLER

Oh my God what's that!

Incoming! Hit it! Get down!

SHARK

What is it? It's beautiful.

TYLER

Butterflies! Butterflies! Giant beautiful dancing butterflies!

JOHN

(He gets up)

Take me! Please! Come and take me! I want to fly! I want to fly too.

Are they dangerous?

TYLER

No.

SHARK

They're so beautiful. Look at that one. She's reaching out to me. Oh – she knows me. She is so beautiful.

TYLER

They say there's one of those for every soldier who is lost. That if she finds you, she'll bring you home herself. She'll carry you home in her – claws.

SHARK

That's mine. That one's mine. She's flying away. Come back. It's me. Please.

JOHN

You can't have one. You're a paper man.

SHARK

That was mine. She's a paper one too.

JOHN

Asshole.

SHARK

Have you ever seen yours?

TYLER

You think I'd trust one of them things? To pick me up off the ground? Hell no.

SHARK

They're still beautiful.

TYLER

SHARK

Fuck em. You don't want to hope. You'll just be disappointed. Come on. Stop.

(He motions them down. He crawls forward and begins carefully brushing away the ground)

They're devils, the Han. Look at this. There, to there, and over there. See that? It's a trap. You put your foot on here and – voom. You're a dead man. They've got you where they want you. Now follow me. Put your foot right where I do, nothing different, if you want to live. Come on.

(He moves carefully forward, step by step)

Sometimes I think, why try? Why not just die. I'm never gonna get outa here. Not me. So why go on? Because somebody's gotta fight the Han. He can't just have it all his way. Someone gotta fight him. Nobody needs me for anything else anyway. I'm the Shark, I'm the fighting man. Get near me, I'll tear you apart. I'm just like an animal. The Han knows it. That's why he don't come here.

(He motions the others)

There.

TYLER

What?

SHARK

The River of Blood.

TYLER

I don't see anything.

SHARK

You think I'm going any closer? You're nuts.

ANCHOR MAN

River of Blood. Myth or Fantasy. Excuse me while I fart.

(Pause. Nothing)

I was sure I had to fart.

(He farts)

Ahhh. There.

Bodies found floating in the River of Blood. News at eleven. And this is your Anchor Man.

(He farts)

Fuck you, man.

SHARK

Uh - uh - uh –

ANCHOR

(The Shark grabs the TV clicker and turns the Anchor Man off)

This is it. I ain't going any closer.

SHARK

But where's the River?

TYLER

There, man. There.

SHARK

Why don't I see it?

TYLER

It's there. That's the end of it. The last trickle of the River of Blood where it flows into the Sea. This is as far as I go.

SHARK

So we cross that. And then what.

TYLER

That's where they took him. That's where he'll be. Follow the River upstream, as far as the Falls. That's where he'll be. Where you goin'?

SHARK

To cross the river.

TYLER

You can't just cross the River, man. That's blood. You don't touch that, man, I got scars. See?

(Shows his right hand)

SHARK

I'm supposed to cross it, right. How am I supposed to do that, you tell me.

TYLER

Over the bridge.

JOHN

What bridge.

TYLER

JOHN

There's a bridge, up by the Falls.

SHARK

If you can call that a bridge. No one's ever made it across, that I ever heard of.

JOHN

John did.

SHARK

Man, don't listen to him. Just, go into the Sea. You can get around it that way.

TYLER

It's right over here, right? The River? It doesn't look that deep.

SHARK

Man, don't do it, don't do it –

(Tyler squats down by the River and reaches in with his right hand, up to the wrist to see how deep it is. He pulls his hand out fast)

TYLER

Ow – ow – ow – ow – ow – ow –

(He spins around the stage in pain banging into things, finally collapses, cradling his hand and moaning)

Jesus. Jesus. Oh.

(He crawls around, finds his tape recorder. He is back in the reality of his room. Leans against a piece of furniture as he makes his report)

Doctor Tyler. Reporting. Don't touch the River of Blood. Don't touch it. It burns. Ow. We have made some progress. Found a local who claims to know the location where John was last seen. After First Aid we will continue, into the Sea of Loss, up the River of blood to the Falls, where, it is said, we will find John.

(He finds a juice box, pours it over his hand into a waste basket, tapes some masking tape over it)

If I don't make it, this report will serve as a record of our journey, and maybe help the next guy. I'll leave it where it can be found. Over and out.

(He removes the tape, props it on the desk, puts another one in the tape recorder, goes and connects himself to the box again, throws the

switch. His hand continues to hurt. He is thrown by the switch. Cradling his hand, he picks himself up, finds his stuff, looks around)

TYLER (cont.)

Shark? John? Hey, Shark. Guys, where are you? Guys?

(Turns on the tape recorder)

I'm alone. They're gone. Unless....

(Turns it off. He goes to where the others were last standing. He picks up a piece of paper)

I guess he really was a paper man.

(Puts it tenderly in his pocket. Picks up Shark's stick)

They got him. I guess they finally got him.

(Speaks into the tape recorder)

It looks like they got the Shark. The Shark is gone. I've got the paper man. I'm continuing on alone. I'm going to wade the Sea, and start up the River of Blood to see what I can find. If there's anything left. Don't come after me. It's too dangerous. Doctor Tyler reporting live. Over and out.

(He makes his way into the audience, wading as he goes)

It's safe. This far out the blood is diluted into sea water. I can still taste the salt. Ow.

(He dips his hand into the water. It stings. He unwraps it and bathes it in the water.)

I don't want to go up there. I could just stay here in the Sea. It's fine here. Tomorrow, they'll just come in to an empty room. They'll never find me.

Whoa!

(He is dragged up to the stage as though caught by a line and pulled. He lands there flapping and retching)

Stop it – stop it – lemme go – Help!

DAD

I am help, you idiot. Shut up. Lie still. Cough up that water. Come on.

(Pounds Tyler on the back. Tyler throws up)

TYLER

Stop...please....

DAD

That's right. Now what the hell were you doing out there? Answer me?

TYLER

I was fine. I was all right. I was just swimming.

DAD

Swimming. With the fishes. You little idiot. You were drowning when I got to you. This is not a beach for swimming? See? No swimming.

TYLER

I don't see any sign.

(Dad backhands him)

DAD

Don't you backtalk me.

TYLER

I wasn't.

(Dad backhands him again)

DAD

You just did. What were you doing out there. Answer me.

TYLER

I had to cross over. To go up River. I'm looking for John. John Thorne. Have you seen him?

DAD

Of course I've seen him. He's in his room. I put him there.

TYLER

No. He got out. The Han got him.

DAD

He'd better not have gone out. I'll kill him. Do you know what that kid did?

TYLER

John didn't do anything.

DAD

Oh yeah? Then what's he being punished for?

John isn't bad.

TYLER

(Dad backhands him)

Don't you backtalk me.

DAD

(Tyler goes flying)

What do you do with a boy like that. He's a danger. What he's done to the house, what he's done to the neighborhood. It's his fault the street is running in blood. I tried to teach him right from wrong. That's all I did. But would he listen to me? Get up.

(He grabs Tyler and shakes him)

You're not going near that boy, you hear me? You do and I'll kill you. I'll kill you. There. And there. And there. Now remember what I said.

(He beats Tyler with his hands, then throws him to the ground)

Cry baby. Sniveling weakling. You'll never get anywhere if you don't be a man. Shut up.

(Kicks him on the ground. Hears someone)

All right I'm coming.

(To Tyler)

Remember.

(Kicks him once more and goes. Tyler takes the kick in the stomach. Stays crouching for a bit. Then sits up gingerly, looks around)

TYLER

Ow.

(Gets out his tape recorder)

Tyler reporting. I was captured. And questioned. Told them nothing. I managed to confirm. John is a prisoner of the Han. They've got him. And watch out for them. All of the stories are true. Big and white and strong. They fly like hawks and land like meteors. The utmost caution must be taken. Their methods of questioning are diabolical.

(He tries to get up)

God damn it. God damn it.

(He uses Shark's stick and gets up)

TYLER (cont.)

Damn you, man. Damn you. God damn you.

(He beats the stick on the furniture as he curses.  
He makes a lot of noise)

SHARK

That's right. You tell 'em. That's right. It's the Shark. That's right. I crossed the River by a way known only to me.

TYLER

Fuck you, man. You're full of shit.

SHARK

I know, man, you're hurtin. They got to you, I know the signs.

TYLER

Nobody got to me. Fuck you, man, where were you.

SHARK

Watchin and listening, biding my time. I'm a beast in the jungle, I'm silent, I'm the Shark. I crossed over cause I felt sorry for you, man, you and the paper man. And then you got took. So I followed you.

TYLER

You're full of shit, man, where were you when I was being questioned?

SHARK

Don't you talk that way to me. Who called him off you? I did. I made the Muriel cry and I called him away. How else would you have escaped. Don't you shit me, man. They can pick us off like that when we're alone. But I'll stick with you. I'm your man. Come on, man, together we're strong. I'll go with you, and we'll kill any Han we see. What do you say.

TYLER

All right. Thanks, Shark.

SHARK

Yeah. I'll protect you. They'll never get us again, either of us. They try and – bam!

(He slams his stick on the furniture)

TYLER

John's up there. They're holding him prisoner.

SHARK

I know. I heard. But you're not going anywhere while you're looking like that. Here.

(Holds out a small bottle, and a glass)

TYLER

What is it.

SHARK

Two aspirin, and a glass of milk. That's what you need. Come on.

(Tyler takes the pills, drinks the milk)

TYLER

Thanks.

SHARK

You let that stuff take hold. Just, cool out there for a bit. I'll keep watch. And while we wait I'll tell you a story.

Once there was a soldier. Me, the Shark. Anybody that hurt him he killed it. Bam bam. Anybody that hurt anybody he killed it. Bam bam. That's why they called him the Shark. The end.

TYLER

That's it? Where's the story?

SHARK

That is the story. That's my story. Come on, let's go.

TYLER

Ow...

SHARK

Come on, think about John. Let's go. Stop. What's that.

TYLER

Where?

SHARK

There. What's that.

TYLER

Someone playing. Come on. It's just a little girl.

SHARK

What's she got? Let's question her. Come on. If she tries anything, run. All right?

(The little girl is throwing a baseball glove in the air and catching it, singing to herself. She sees the two guys and hides it behind her back)

Hi. What you got.

TYLER

Nothing.

ARLENE

(Hides the mitt behind her)

You've been in the jungle. I'm telling.

TYLER

Can't prove anything.

ARLENE

Want to play – catch?

TYLER

All right. Throw it here.

(Arlene throws, Tyler catches it, as soon as he sees what it is, he drops it)

Agh!

ARLENE

Throw it back. It's mine.

TYLER

No! No – it's John's – it's John's hand – where did you get this. Tell me right now where did you get this.

ARLENE

Found it.

TYLER

You liar!

ARLENE

I did too. Things are always flying out of that house. There's a flying chopper in that house. It chops things up and throws them out. It goes – RRRRARGH –

(Man noise)

and then – chop chop chop chop chop chop –

TYLER

DOES NOT!

ARLENE

Then where does all the blood come from, pouring down the steps and into the street. Pouring down the steps and down the street.

TYLER

Does not.

ARLENE

Does too.

(Holds up her hand with some of her fingers folded down, then holds up the other hand)

See? I touched the blood – sssss –

(Fingers sizzling away)

But this was the chopper.

(Shows other fingers)

I went up – just up the steps of the house – and it got me! – RRAGH – chop chop chop chop – my fingers go flying out the window. I found em. See?

(Takes a couple of bread sticks out of her pocket)

Want one?

(Starts to suck on one)

Do you bite your nails? You shouldn't. This is why.

(She chews the end off one of the bread sticks)

TYLER

When you were in there did you see John?

ARLENE

John? No.

TYLER

He's in there. I have to find him.

ARLENE

Of course he's in there. He lives there.

TYLER

He doesn't live there. They are holding him in there. In a room.

ARLENE

In his room. I wouldn't go there. I don't want to see him. You heard what he did to his brother George.

TYLER

JOHN DIDN'T DO ANYTHING TO GEORGE.

ARLENE

But George is dead, isn't he. So there.

TYLER

JOHN DIDN'T DO ANYTHING TO GEORGE. He didn't do it. He didn't do it. George...

(He goes to his bed and throws himself on it. He curls up)

(The Shark goes and stands watch over him, balancing his stick like a weapon over his shoulders, chewing on a piece of grass or something)

SHARK

It's pretty, isn't it. And peaceful. I've never watched the sunset from this side of the river. The red sinking into the red, and the mist rising up like blood spray. Soft. It's peaceful in the evening.

(He turns, alert, on guard, as he hears the sound of people coming into the room)

(The Doctor and Nurse come and stand over Tyler)

DOCTOR

He seems all right now, Nurse.

NURSE

That is because I gave him a sedative, Doctor. He was very agitated. Banging on the furniture. Beginning to get violent.

DOCTOR

His mother's coming tomorrow. That's the problem, if you ask me. If you have any further trouble with him tonight you'll have to restrain him.

NURSE

Yes, Doctor.

(They go. Shark reappears, stalks them to the door)

SHARK

And stay out. Watchful, on guard, at the first sign of trouble he sinks into the mist, invisible. Unfathomable. Uncatchable. I'm the Shark, that's me.

(He goes to the bed, gives Tyler a jab)

Let's go, let's move out. Come on. There's a moon tonight. We can see by it.

TYLER

All right. Don't we just follow the river?

SHARK

While you were asleep I scouted another way up to the house. It's a short cut. But be quiet. There's bone everywhere. You snap one of those babies it'll sound off like a pistol shot. They'll be on us in seconds. Come on. Keep up. Across here, on the other side of those trees, is the house. Come on. What's keeping you?

TYLER

I'm trying to miss the bones, man. I can't. Hey, it's all bones. It's all bones. Hey Shark, Shark I'm sinking.

SHARK

You're too heavy, man. Walk light. Come on.

TYLER

The bones, they're not holding – ow! – they're pulverizing under me – Shark help me, help me I'm going down – ow – this stuff is sharp man – help –

(Someone grabs his hand, pulls him up to his knees)

Oh thanks – thanks. I thought I was going under there. Who are you? Are – you – my butterfly?

GRAMPA

Your what? Your flutterby? Ha. Well let's see here. If I was that I could fly. Let's see –

(He tries to fly)

Nope.

TYLER

Who are you?

GRAMPA

What's it look like? I'm the keeper of the boneyard.

TYLER

Then all these bones are yours?

GRAMPA

All of them? No way. They're dead people's. And I keep em. There. That's Aunt Olive's over there. She had a chest like a steam engine, see? And Gramma Agnes, that's her jawbone, no question. And here – it's little George.

TYLER

That's George? Did you know George?

GRAMPA

Know him? Course I know him. Isn't he my first only grandson? Know him? Ha.

TYLER

Then – did you know John?

GRAMPA

Oh he's around here too – ah, here. That's John. Some of him.

TYLER

But – John's not dead.

GRAMPA

No, but he's all broken up. You'll find him all over everywhere.

TYLER

Did you know John? Did I know you?

GRAMPA

I held John once when he was a baby. I dropped dead a couple of days later.

ANCHOR MAN

Thank you Grampa, for that wonderful human interest story. And now, this. Field of Bones found next to a house on Hill Street. Police are investigating the remains of numerous dead found in a vacant field. All are dead. Some may have been eaten. I wouldn't go any closer.

TYLER

Get out of here.

ANCHOR MAN

Hey, it's my job. Look but don't touch. Insinuate everything. Trash the yard. Dig up the bones. And talk incessantly.

TYLER

Get out of here, man. Get out of here!

(Finds the TV clicker, clicks at him)

ANCHOR MAN

Over here, kid. Nuclear bomb headed for Washington. News at –

TYLER  
Shut up!

SHARK  
Shut up shut up shut up man. We're close to the house. This is where it starts getting dangerous. If we get caught here –

TYLER  
Look! Look! It's George! Hey George! C'mere! George!

(He chases George all over the yard)

Hey George c'mon I gotta talk to ya. Hey George – wait – Ah! Got you.

(He tackles George, they collapse together)

Hey. I never did that before.

GEORGE  
That's cause you got bigger. I didn't.

TYLER  
You're dead then. Really dead.

GEORGE  
Yeah. I guess.

TYLER  
What's it like.

GEORGE  
What's it like being alive.

TYLER  
Not so good. There's all these flies in my room.

GEORGE  
So? Kill em.

TYLER  
Do you remember when you died.

GEORGE  
Sure I do.

TYLER  
Do you remember what happened.

Of course. I fell down the stairs.

GEORGE

And John, he didn't push you or anything.

TYLER

Nope. I just fell down the stairs. Crushed my skull. Dead before I hit the floor.

GEORGE

But your eyes were open.

TYLER

Yeah. I could see you.

GEORGE

You could not. You were dead.

TYLER

I can see you now.

GEORGE

That's different.

TYLER

It's not. I was looking at you and you were upside down on the stairs –

GEORGE

I was not. What's that?

TYLER

I don't hear anything.

GEORGE

I thought I heard – it's the Han. Come on quick – run.

TYLER

It's just Dad. Come on. This way.

GEORGE

(They bolt)

Come on! Down here. The cellar. He won't look for us here. There. He'll never find us here.

Dad said if we left the house he'd kill us.

TYLER

So? We haven't left the house. We're under the house. That door comes up under the stairs. You remember that don't you?

GEORGE

TYLER  
Yeah, right.

GEORGE  
We'll just stay down here until he's not mad anymore. Until he falls asleep.

TYLER  
Until he falls dead.

GEORGE  
Shut up.

TYLER  
Well. It could happen. George. Where's Mom. Dad's up there – Mom – !

GEORGE  
It's all right. Sit down. She's not home. Look. We're like soldiers hiding out in the tunnels. At night we come out and kill and kill and kill.

TYLER  
Yeah.

GEORGE  
In the day time we're safe, in the dark. We hide and we're safe. And nobody will find us. Ever. I'll be – Shark. The killer. The soldier Shark. Nobody ever even sees me.

TYLER  
I'm Tyler. The brave.

GEORGE  
I'm the Shark. If Dad catches you, remember – Tyler can't be hurt. And the Shark is coming. The Shark will save you.

TYLER  
And if Dad comes after you –

GEORGE  
The Shark can't be caught. No one ever catches the Shark.

TYLER  
Until you fell down the stairs. That caught you.

GEORGE  
No. He hit me first with a baseball bat. My own bat. Crushed my skull. Then he threw me down the stairs.

TYLER  
He did not! He couldn't have!

GEORGE

Of course he did. I was there I know.

TYLER

Shut up. Shut up. Shut up.

GEORGE

I saw you come in. You were upside down at the bottom of the stairs. Dad was up at the top and he said –

TYLER

SEE WHAT YOU MADE ME DO. SEE WHAT YOU MADE ME DO. SEE WHAT YOU MADE ME DO.

(The Doctor is standing over Tyler)

DOCTOR

John, it's all right. If you don't want to clean your room right now you don't have to. I just came to ask you if you have any feelings you would like to discuss. You know your mother is coming here tomorrow. I spoke with her on the phone. She is looking forward very much to seeing you. John? Would you like to talk to me now?

(To the Nurse)

I think, just for the present, we should increase his sedation. What's his dosage? Nurse? Double it. Good night, John.

(The Nurse brings pills and a glass of water)

NURSE

Come on, John. Don't fight me now. You know what will happen to you if you fight me.

(Shaking, Tyler takes the pills, drinks the water)

Good. You sleep well, you hear. Or at least, be quiet.

(She goes)

TYLER

They're trying to poison me.

(He spits the pills into his hand, throws them away)

GEORGE

Not poison. Drugs. Make you feel better. Make you feel swimmy. It's nice. Come on. Dad's asleep. Let's go up and see if Mom's home.

TYLER

No, let's wait until we hear her, okay?

GEORGE

No let's go, come on. No one will see us. And if Dad catches me, I won't make a sound. Don't tell him where we've been, okay. I won't. No matter how much he hits me, I won't make a sound.

TYLER

I won't either.

GEORGE

Yes you will. Last time you screamed and screamed.

TYLER

I won't yell. I'm Tyler and I don't feel anything.

(They go running up the stairs. Tyler freezes at the sight above him)

GEORGE!

(Dad picks up Shark's stick, holds it like a baseball bat)

DAD

So what do you want, you guys want to hit a few or what. I used to pitch, in high school. I'll throw you a few. George, you're the batter. John, go out in the field. Or I know. I'll be the batter. You can both practice your fielding.

(He smashes the stick into the furniture)

TYLER

GEORGE!

DAD

What are you guys doing Making This Kinda NOISE! I'LL TEACH YOU TO YELL LIKE THAT IN THE HOUSE.

(He holds up an imaginary ball)

Ready?

(He smashes the bat into the furniture)

TYLER

GEORGE!

(Tyler collapses)

TYLER (cont.)

He killed him he killed him he killed him he killed him he killed him – my Dad, he killed him. My brother. My Dad killed him. He killed him –

(His mother gathers him in her arms)

MOTHER

John, hush, hush, sh...stop saying that.

TYLER

It's true. Mom, it's true.

MOTHER

You have to stop saying that. Honey, what would I do if he hurt you too? Now listen. Listen to me. Are you listening?

TYLER

Yes.

MOTHER

Your Dad is going to say that George fell down the stairs and hit his head. That's what he's going to say. Do you understand? Because that's what we have to say too.

TYLER

What about the bat?

MOTHER

What bat? John, there was no bat. Understand me? George hit his head on the edge of the stairs. He fell and hit his head right on the stairs.

TYLER

But – but what about George. It's not true.

MOTHER

George is dead. We are alive. We have to stay that way. John, you know what your Dad's like. We'll do it his way. Promise me. Just till he calms down. Then we'll see. Now promise.

TYLER

All right.

MOTHER

Say it. George fell down the stairs.

TYLER

George fell down the stairs. He hit his head on the stairs.

MOTHER

That's right.

TYLER

Mom? I miss George.

MOTHER

Oh so do I. We'll always miss George. But he'll always be with us too. As long as we remember him.

TYLER

George fell down the stairs. He fell down and hit his head on the stairs. My brother died on the stairs.

GEORGE

Hey. Idiot.

TYLER

Yeah. What.

GEORGE

Come on. I got something to show you.

TYLER

Not now, George. I just want to sit here.

GEORGE

I'm not George. I'm the Shark. Now come on, man, come quick. I got something to show you.

(Tyler follows George)

There.

TYLER

What?

GEORGE

Can't you hear that?

TYLER

What?

GEORGE

Mom's upstairs with Dad. Hear that?

(Tyler covers his ears)

TYLER

No.

GEORGE

You do. You can hear –

TYLER  
Mom's crying. And Dad – Dad, stop. George, do something.

GEORGE  
But I can't. That's the problem. I'm dead.

TYLER  
(Quietly)  
Dad? Dad, stop, please. Mom? Are you all right?

GEORGE  
They can't hear you.

TYLER  
Dad?

(He takes one step up the stairs)

GEORGE  
What are you doing?

TYLER  
I can't hear Mom anymore. I'm going to....

(He doesn't go any further)

GEORGE  
What.

TYLER  
I'm just going to ask Dad if Mom is all right.

GEORGE  
Sure you are.

TYLER  
I am.

(He takes a second step up the stairs. All steps are improvised from the room's actual furniture; he is climbing up the furniture)

GEORGE  
You're scared.

TYLER  
Sure I'm scared.

GEORGE

When you get to the top you're going to die. You know you're going to die. Just like me.

TYLER

That was an accident.

GEORGE

George fell down the stairs. George fell and hit his head on the stairs. You had to say it so many times you believed it.

TYLER

It was an accident. He didn't mean to hurt you. He doesn't mean to hurt anybody.

GEORGE

And you love him, too.

TYLER

You loved him.

GEORGE

Sure I did. He's my Dad. But I didn't mean to fall down the stairs. Go on. Dad's up there. Go on.

TYLER

Mom?

(He climbs up a few more steps)

Are you all right? Mom?

Dad. It's me. John. I just – is Mom all right? I could hear you guys. Dad – I just – I want to go to my room – Dad no please don't – MOM DON'T DO IT NO!

(Tyler's father's body hits him and Tyler falls down the stairs with his father on top of him)

Agh! Off me! Get off me! Agh!

(He drags himself out from under the body. He is covered with blood. He tries to shake it off. He tries to rub it off the furniture. He strips off his outer clothing)

(He curls up in the fetal position in one of the chairs)

DOCTOR

This is the one. Watch this.

(He pulls up Tyler's arm and lets it go: it stays in the air)

DOCTOR (cont.)

Classic catatonia. Complete withdrawal. You can do anything you want to the body, he won't feel it, and it'll stay just the way you put it. He's been like this – a year? Two years? I don't have the charts. He's been this way ever since the day he murdered his father. Hit his father with a baseball bat and threw him down the stairs. Probably did his older brother too – his brother died the exact same way on the exact same set of stairs. Did he think no one would notice? He's lucky to be in here, really. If he leaves here, he'll fry. For murder. Doesn't look like such a monster now, does he? Just don't put a bat in his hand, and stay away from the stairs.

(Tyler goes and gets the tape recorder and speaks into it)

TYLER

John Tyler Thorne. For the record. I did not kill my father. I did not kill my father. I want to stand trial so that it can be proved, I did not kill my father. I was standing a few steps from the foot of the stairs when I saw my father appear on the landing above me. He – he threatened me. When he raised his hand to hit me I saw, behind him – He fell. He fell down the stairs and hit his head. He fell on top of me. And that is how he died. It was an accident. I want everyone to know.

The baseball bat was kept in the crawl space of a closet in my Dad's room that he kept locked. It was not my bat. It was my brother, George's. Who died in a similar – accident.

I did not kill my father. I did not kill my brother, either.

My mother....my mother will tell you that what I am saying is true. Ask her. She'll tell you. My mother. Muriel Tyler Thorne.

(He takes out the tape. Places it in a prominent place. Puts in another tape. Records:)

I have made a tape of the actual events that caused my father's death. And my brother's. I have left it where it can be found. In a safe place. Where the blood won't reach it.

(He goes around the room and moves all the tapes to as high a plane as he can)

(He shakes the blood off his shoes)

What's going on. What's happening. It's wet. Hey! It's flooding in here.

(He touches it)

Ow – ow! It's hot – it's blood.

GEORGE

You have to get out. The river is rising.

TYLER

I can't get out.

GEORGE

You better think of something. You go under in that stuff all that's going to be left of you is a pile of bone.

(Tyler gets up on the furniture)

Just wait it out. That's all you have to do. You're going to be all right, John. Who knows. Maybe this time things will even get better.

TYLER

George. Mom is up there.

GEORGE

You have to get out. The river is rising.

TYLER

I can't get out. They keep me locked in here.

GEORGE

You better think of something.

(Tyler gets up on the furniture)

That's good. You're going to be all right, John. This time you may make it.

TYLER

George. Mom is up there. Mom is up those stairs. Dad did something to her.

GEORGE

John – sit tight. Mom will be all right.

TYLER

I better go and see.

GEORGE

You can't go up those stairs while the River is running. John, your feet will be nothing but bone by the time you get up there. John. Mom is fine.

TYLER

I have to know.

(He wades through the River of Blood until he stands at the foot of the stairs. It hurts him)

everywhere it touches him as it gradually strips the flesh from his bones. At the foot of the stairs:

TYLER (cont.)

Mom? Mom! Are you up there? I'm going to find her and then we'll get out of here together. Then we'll escape. George. I don't want to leave you.

GEORGE

Get out of here. I'm already dead. Get up there while you still have feet to stand on. Go. Go!

(Tyler runs to the top of the stairs. At the top:)

TYLER

Mom! Mom! Dad.

I was just looking for Mom. Cause I heard her – up here – and she sounded bad – and then I didn't hear her anymore and I just want to know – is she all right? Dad? Listen. I don't want you to hurt Mom anymore. And I don't want you to hurt me anymore. You're not going to hurt anybody anymore. That's it. Enough.

Dad?

(Puts his hands out and walks to Dad, walks right through him. There's no one there)

He's gone.

I've got to get out of here. While I can still walk. There's got to be a bridge out of here. Across the river. And then I'll be home free. Mom will know.

Mom. Mom! Help me. Please. Get me out of here. Mom!

(He sees her flying toward him)

You're flying. You're a butterfly. My own butterfly. And – you're bringing the bridge. I can see it now. It's here.

(The bridge is some strands of cassette tape attached to furniture across the room from him, so that when Tyler stretches his end tight it stretches across the space)

Mom, look what I've done. I've found John. I've put it all together. Finally. I did it. And if you lift when I try to cross the bridge – it isn't strong enough for me – if you lift me we can go across together.

I've gathered all the pieces. I've cleaned the blood off. I'm not Tyler, or the paper man. I'm not the Shark. And Dad killed George.

TYLER (cont.)

I remember everything now. I remember what happened. I can go to them now and tell them, I did not kill my father with a baseball bat and throw him down the stairs. I was below him when it happened. He fell on me. That's what confused me but I remember now. They can't fry me now. I didn't do it.

You did.

You killed him. I saw you. Behind him. Holding the bat. I saw you swing it.

(Tyler takes all the stuff he has gathered on his journey and lets it fall into the River)

Fly away. Fly away, butterfly. Be free. Fly away, fly away. I love you.

(He scatters all the stuff around the room. Then he disconnects the bridge and throws it in as well)

Bye Mom. Good-bye. I wish...I wish he had killed me too. So I wouldn't have to stay in this house. Go on. Get out of here. Go!

(Takes the piece of paper out of his pocket, throws it in the River)

Paper man, on your way.

(He dips his leg in the river. It hurts)

Ow. Oh. Tyler's goin down. Tyler's gonna drown. Nothing but bone. Bone can't talk. Nothing but bone.

(He wades around the room collecting all the tapes he made, and pulling out the tape from the cassettes, pulling and wading until he has a tangle of cassette following him behind all around the room. He breaks the tapes from the cassettes and throws them all away)

Be free!

(He then dismantles the furniture, spreading it all around leaving no trace of what he built before)

(He watches the River rise and consume his body till it reaches his neck. It hurts)

Nothing but bone for the bone pile. Nothing but bone. Nothing but bone.

(He goes down)

(His mother enters softly, goes and stands over his bed)

MOTHER

Is this my son? He's so thin. Oh, John.

DOCTOR

John Tyler Thorne. That's right, Mrs. Thorne. There are times when we have trouble getting him to eat.

MOTHER

So did I. He isn't always tied up like this, is he?

DOCTOR

Of course not. He became agitated during the night. He tried to wreck his room.

MOTHER

Oh dear. John. I hope he isn't always this much trouble to you.

DOCTOR

Not generally, Mrs. Thorne. He is generally a very co-operative patient. He has his hobbies, as you can see. A few too many at the moment. He likes to talk into his tape recorder. Just gibberish, really. Diagnostically he presents nothing major. He persists in a few delusions.

MOTHER

What kinds of delusions.

DOCTOR

He complains that there are flies in his room. Well as you can see, Mrs. Thorne. There are no flies in here.

MOTHER

Yes, I do see.

DOCTOR

If there were ever to be an actual fly, it would of course be killed. Removed, or killed. So you see, John is actually fairly content with us. As content as he can be.

MOTHER

Will he ever recover? Will he ever get well?

DOCTOR

I'm afraid not. I don't want to mislead you, Mrs. Thorne. I don't think you're ever going to see him any better than he is now. In some ways that's for the best, isn't it.

MOTHER

What do you mean?

DOCTOR

Well. He'd have to stand trial, wouldn't he. If he were sane. For the murder of his father.

MOTHER

Yes. He's have to stand trial. Are you sure he's all right? He looks so uncomfortable tied up like that.

DOCTOR

He can't feel anything, Mrs. Thorne. I don't think he can hear you either. I'm afraid he lives in some strange world of his own, that we will never know.

MOTHER

Will you leave me alone with him. Please.

DOCTOR

Mrs. Thorne, I don't think – very well. Someone will be right outside in case you call.

MOTHER

Thank you.

(She kneels by the bed)

John. Sweetheart. It's Mom. I hope that it's true what the doctor said, that you're not in pain. I couldn't stand to think, after all you went through, that you aren't at least spared from that. I tried to help you. I tried to stop your Dad. In every way I knew. I'm so sorry that I couldn't do more. I didn't know what to do, I wish I did. I told them afterwards that I was the one who did it, I was the one. They didn't believe me. I'd been in the hospital. They thought I was only saying it to protect you. John. John, get well. Can you hear me? Please get well. Don't stay like this. We'll go and tell them together, what really happened.

And if you can't. Remember, John. Wherever you are now, wherever you're hiding away. I love you. Sleep well. Good night.

(Lights fade. Blackout)

The End