



Celery Farm

Written by
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WORMWOOD
and the Five Fingers of Glory

a prose/audio anthology from Habit Forming Films

www.wormwoodshow.com



{Fig. 1} ex., "Hand of Glory"

Wormwood: A Serialized Mystery is an audio podcast production of Habit Forming Films, LLC.

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Wormwood and the Five Fingers of Glory

*An Audio & Prose Anthology for
Wormwood: A Serialized Mystery*

The Hand of Glory remains one of the strange artifacts at the dark heart of the many mysteries of Wormwood. An occult object of great curiosity, The Hand has crept into the very center of the chaotic maelstrom of murder and magic in Wormwood, California. The Hand's true origin has never been revealed. Until now.

"The Five Fingers of Glory" is a new anthology kicking off third season of the critically acclaimed and award-winning audio drama podcast, *Wormwood: A Serialized Mystery*.

The anthology series charts the path of the fabled Hand of Glory through history, from its creation in 700 BC to its arrival in present-day Wormwood. Inspired by the works of writers such as Robert E. Howard, Bram Stoker, Dashiell Hammett and Richard Matheson, three Wormwood writers have taken up the task of revealing the storied history of the Hand of Glory from the dusty streets of ancient Assyria to a haunted Sicilian Monastery to the shadowy back-streets of Chinatown and beyond.



“—the little one has been dead for two days already, and he hasn't caught on. She's quite the ghoulish sight, too,” Orson looks up just as Harry closes the office door behind him.

Celery Farm

by

Jeremy Rogers

(with acknowledgment to the works of Richard Matheson)

In his office, upon the sleek oak desk, is a high stack of loose white paper and one ballpoint pen. There is a window directly behind the desk, offering a successful view of downtown Los Angeles.

Harry Wrightson opens his office door. He loosens his tie with one hand, timed precisely as his other is closing the door behind him. The first thing he does this morning is stand in front of the window. This is no different than any other morning.

A telephone clatters faint from the office directly to his right. Harry knows the sound all too well, how the telephones here are meant to stir startled nerves into action. However, through the shared office wall, the effect is not the same. The ringing is not Harry's problem, so he disconnects and dreams.

It's now when the smell of coffee seeps in from crosshatched paths of coworkers traversing the passage outside his closed door. Harry never drinks the stuff, at least not until the afternoon when everyone else turns the knob in favor of scotch. The scent of fresh coffee has a way of denying Harry immersive reverie

in the morning. He removes his jacket, and for the moment it takes him to walk to the coat rack by the door, he peels his eyes off the window. Harry crumples his white sleeves up to his elbows and returns to the view.

Five minutes past 9am, the insufferable nimrod from Creve Coeur with bad ideas and nicotine stained teeth arrives to answer the rattling phone in the office over. Harry was invited to sit in on his interview, and his first impression was that this fellow would be a handful. Apparently, management didn't heed the warning. "*Hello, Orson Theodore here,*" his Midwestern elocution comes muted through the wall. "*I know this is my first day here with the agency,*" the burst of a wooden match interrupts his speech. In a moment, the sharp smoke will find way into Harry's office. "*But I had to make sure that his wife was —*"

Harry tunes the dialogue out.

Finally, she opens the blinds for the morning light. Harry stands and watches from his perch across the business center courtyard. Her blouse is open more than it was yesterday, allowing the fabric to stretch and part severely across her dark-skinned chest. He wonders if she can see him, too, or if the glare of the new day sun conceals his image behind his window. It's early still, by lunch the executives and the secretaries from these neighboring buildings will drift into her establishment for upscale palm readings and spirit board games.

Harry has never ventured down into her occult world; maybe he will call on her today on his lunch hour. Will she know that Harry has been watching her? Of course, this is the same thought as every other day, and Harry knows he won't ever introduce himself.

It's time to work now. Dread it all he wants, Harry knows that he really shouldn't put it off any longer.

Harry removes his watch and positions it thoughtfully on his desk beside the mound of clean paper. The Timex was a Father's Day gift last year. His sleeves are already rolled to his elbows, but he checks them again. He doesn't understand his career. Why did they come to him and offer this particular job? Harry steps out of his office with a sigh.

The door opens into Orson Theodore's neighboring office. The same floor-to-ceiling window that Harry has is pasted here with newspaper clippings alternating obituary listings and pharmaceutical adverts. The glow is sepia, swirling hot with burned channels forced into motion from the tips of Lucky Strikes.

"—the little one has been dead for two days already, and he hasn't caught on. She's quite the ghoulish sight, too," Orson looks up just as Harry closes the office door behind him. "Hold on, Kalila. I need to go, darling. It's time I get to work."

Harry pauses in the doorway. He looks down at his feet and how the swinging door has tugged at the plastic covering the corner. He isn't sure which administrative assistant was tasked with this particular job, but Harry feels they did the work well as everything is mostly lined with a milky semi-transparency. From the floor, to the walls, to the surface of every piece of sleek oak furniture, this office has been meticulously prepared. Harry pushes his shoe down on the loose corner edge to reseal the protection and make it all a tad more seamless. The plastic crinkles under his slow, but progressive steps inward.

"Mister Wrightson," Orson stands quickly, fumbling to return the phone to the cradle and crush out his cigarette. "It's so nice to finally meet—"

"Kalila, is she your wife? Harry stalls the proceedings with a question, and another before giving time to answer the first. "Where does the name *Kalila* originate?"

"In Haiti, sir," Orson steps across the tarp covered floor with his hand extended. "She is *manbo*, mediator between humans and spirits – "

"It's quite the pretty name," Harry says.

The two men shake hands, one with an impression in mind and the other sopping in sweat.

Harry has learned the most efficient angle to position a body against the edge of the desk in order to break the head free from the torso and direct blood flow away from his white shirt and leather shoes. Might as well do it now, he thinks.

In the afternoon, Harry waits for the mailroom to send a courier to come pick up the packaged severed head for transport upstairs. He has cleaned it neat, even brushed the blood off the teeth. As usual, he pauses momentarily to speculate, who and for what purpose the heads serve. Perhaps they are eaten? Harry knows better than to allow himself to drift down this nightmarish path.

Harry steps to his office window. Her blinds are closed. He is ready for his afternoon cup of coffee now.



The alarm clock wakes Harry. His hand is on his wife, his fingers must have fumbled down between her legs as they both slept, and are now numb from constricted circulation.

"Oh, your hand is so cold," Harry's wife, Norma, turns and whimpers.

Harry stretches across the bed, and slams his uncoordinated deadened hand onto the alarm clock with enough misjudged force to unhinge the metal hammer

and pinch a nasty gash across his palm. He barely feels it.

"Goddammit," Harry says, and sits up in bed.

Norma rolls onto her side for a better look. Her long raven hair falls over her face and moves in currents across her widening green eyes. She pulls herself through the bed sheets, slinking like a snake, her eyes on the blood pooling in Harry's cupped hand.

"Oh, baby," she coos, then suctions her damp mouth onto the wound to clean him. Her body grows on the bed, following his hand as it rises to advance her slight sleep attire off over her head. In a moment, they are both naked, speckled cherry, and kissing.

"I had a bad dream," Harry blurts out suddenly during a gasp for fresh air away from Norma's aggressive mouth. He wasn't sure why he was trying to tell her this now. "You think it might have something to do with that new microwave oven?"

"Sure, Harry. Go ahead and tell me about your nightmare," Norma replies, though not convincingly in favor of continuing the discussion.

"Later," Harry knew that he was a fool for loosing focus during her uninhibited mood. His memory of the nightmare fades...

Harry steps out of the bathroom, buttoning his white shirt, releasing a cloud of steam from the shower that hovers over the bed like a ghost above Norma's naked body. Her fingertips absentmindedly caress her goaded nipples, an act that lingers her sexuality, even though she's close to nodding back to sleep.

"Your grandfather called yesterday, says the house in Allendale needs to be

painted this summer," she spreads her legs, completely exposing herself to Harry. "He says your grandmother sends her love."

"He's seeing her again, is he?" Harry coils his tie around and under his starched collar. His bandaged hand is spreading blood from his palm and he leaves a brushstroke of red on his white shirt.

"Maybe we should move him out here with us," Norma sits up and pulls the covers around her.

"He won't ever leave that rickety old house. *As there is no access or address, the house then must not exist in sooth*, he used to like to say," Harry becomes distracted. The reminiscence of childhood horrors spawned within that house on the edge of the marsh make him feel like a little boy scared of every long shadow again.

Harry sits on the edge of the bed and puts on his shoes. Norma pulls herself up behind him, wraps her slender arms around his shoulders. She nestles her head against his neck.

"That *rickety* old house will be yours one day. And all of those dusty antiques cluttering the shelves could really make life easier for us if we can find the right buyer," Norma whispers into his ear.

"We can't sell any of that junk," Harry says. "There's nothing there but a second-rate collection of spookhouse memorabilia. It's worthless."

"You'd be surprised by what people would do for scary things," Norma smiles in a way that she would never let Harry see. "What if we don't bring him to live with us? He's an old man and he's all alone on the East Coast. How long do you think he'll last if we don't do anything for him? Harry... would it be so bad if we

left him alone and let him die?"

"What's with all of this talk about my grandfather dying?" Harry rubs at a scuff on his leather shoes. "Sure," he continues, "there might be something to be had by selling the property to the New Jersey conservation society. But I wouldn't hold my breath."

"Yes! Let the bird watchers tear that ramshackle house down. We'll auction everything inside, and then the three of us can —" Norma sinks her fingers into Harry's shoulders. Her words turn into an undertone as she rises to her knees for the raised leverage to squash him down into the bed. Whether this is an act of tender concern or the start of an aggressive attack, Harry is oblivious. *"— and then the three of us can be together again."*

Harry drops his head.

He says, "My grandmother died of cancer twenty-five years ago, and my grandfather believed that she found her way back to the house now and then to look in on their collection. That scared me to death when I was a kid."

"If any house could be haunted," Norma tells Harry, turning his head gently to the side so they can look into each other's eyes. "Sell it. Sell the house, Harry. Let it be somebody else's nightmare."

"It's not the house so much. Not really. It was the Celery Farm. During the summers when I was made to visit, I'd lie in my stale smelling bed at night and listen to the noises outside my window. I could hear the birds and the hissing and gurgling of the marshland. When I would close my eyes, I'd see the ephemeral shadows of the Indians who used to inhabit the creepy patch of land. It was bloodcurdling to think of the specters of painted warriors creeping outside

my window in the dark," Harry turns pale with his words.

"You were a child," Norma reassures him.

"My grandfather was convinced the Celery Farm was the very element that emboldened the house. That tendril of wetland leached onto the property to let her return home," Harry stands. He collects his wallet from the bedside table, and then picks up his Timex.

"It used to be, the bog stood well over a hundred yards from the house. The last I saw, it had extended beneath the foundation. Give it enough time and I'm sure that the Celery Farm will consume the house, swallow it whole." Harry kisses Norma on her forehead.

"I'm late for work."

The golden sun blinds Harry as soon as he finds his way into the hallway. He moves through the kitchen and finds a half eaten bowl of cereal in the sink, the discoloration of milk left in a glass. Through the little window over the sink, he watches the school bus retract the stop sign and pull away.



The elevator bell sounds. The metal door splits in the middle and spills businessmen and secretaries across the building corridor. The similarity to gutting a monstrously large animal is lost on all.

Harry walks a few paces behind his associates. There was a time when Harry was the shining light of the agency, but those days have long since dissipated as he settled gently and squarely in the middle. As is typical with every morning,

there isn't any conversation that involves him today.

A sensation of dread consumes Harry as he steps near his office. He recalls the grisly nightmare with a sickening visual flair triggered by pulse flashes behind his heavy lids – how the man's neck splintered drearily within the skin sheath. Harry could distinctly feel the neck muscles resist the strain with rigidity before succumbing to listlessness. Once the crackle of spine had shattered into workable edges, it was just a matter of instigating the bones internal to cut the stressed skin bent across the edge of the desk. As soon as the jugular vein was open to the elements, Harry knew the fissure was there and the head could be ripped from the convulsing body.

Damn, he thinks with an inundation of disgust. Could I have it in me to do something so violent? It felt so real, so... natural. Harry feels nauseous.

The door to the office right of Harry's is wide open. As the janitor wipes streaks from the window in long shrilling arcs, Harry watches. The office is spick and span, he notices. The oak furniture has been dusted the desk supplies fully stocked. The carpet has been vacuumed. The new employee from the Midwest is due to start work today, still Harry questions whether this clean staging is for preparation of a welcome or for removing incriminating evidence.

Harry opens his office door, and as usual, loosens his tie as he closes the door behind him. He hooks his jacket on the coat rack, then ambles to his desk where he pushes a few folders aside, spewing reports. His desk is a mess of incomplete work and paper refuse made into characters of black-stained Styrofoam cups and burnt orange cigarette filters.

A family portrait is knocked from the corner of the desk to the floor. The glass cracks across the frame like branched lightning.

Down to his knees to gather the broken pieces, Harry picks shards of glass off the photograph. The shot was taken last year at one of the department stores downtown, the sort of place that lures mothers in with cheap holiday backgrounds pulled down on rolls of paper. *Do you want a cartoonish snow land with a leering snowman, or perhaps a manger with the fiery meteor-Star of Bethlehem moments away from catastrophic impact?*

Looking, Harry smiled broadly in the photograph, though his eyes diverted away from the lens seemingly just before the photographer released the shutter. He remembers that his sideburns were shorter then, and his eyes less fatigued. To his side, under the protective shield of his arm, Norma was caught in the middle of a blink, an effect that left her appearing blind. Harry always did love her. He pinches a sliver of glass from the center of the frame to better see his daughter. She was four years old in the photograph, just a cherub with puffy cheeks, beaming excitedly front and center of her two parents. Her dress was so goddamn pretty, Harry recalls with a swift tinge of sadness. It was rather like something a pampered rich kid's doll would be dressed in on a Sunday morning. Harry picks at the scratched paper sheen across the middle of his daughter's face.

"Matilda," Harry mumbles... "Matilda, baby."

A red drop explodes across little Matilda's innocent smile and highlights her pale hair with a foreboding horror. Harry realizes that he has bled enough to soak through his bandage. He attempts an ineffective swipe to clean the photograph, but it's an act that increases the blot. He returns the frame and pieces of glass to his desk.

Harry stands and slackens his bandage as he steps to look out his window.

Comfort comes with the monotony of everyday action.

Her blinds are closed.

Harry considers her dark skin and forms a connection to the Haitian name that populated the horrific moment of his lingering nightmare. Kalila. Could that really be her name? Perhaps Harry had heard it spoken by one of his associates in the elevator after a lunch scheduled tarot card reading. Such things manage to sneak traction into the mind and hide before jumping out with a shriek in the late hours of the night. Kalila, a woman Harry has never met, has somehow penetrated his subconscious and turned him into a somnambulist –

There's a knock at Harry's office door. It opens with a crack, then all the way.

"Mister Wrightson, you're wanted up on twenty-nine."

"What?" Harry answers too quickly, a reactionary response sped up to shatter and obscure his mental fog. "But nobody is allowed on the top floor."



Two joined copper doors loom at the end of a narrow passage. Harry walks the conduit alone, his shoes starting an echo with each push down onto the cold marble.

Harry straightens his tie, and he twists his neck and notices a track of five parallel scratches left in the dark mahogany walls. These marks run for a few feet before ending at a murky stain in the wood.

He stands at the door and raises his crimson hand to knock, when the left copper access opens on its own agreement. He doesn't see the figure concealed

behind the angled door to allow his entrance.

"Come in, Mister Wrightson," a disembodied male voice registers deep and calm.

Harry steps into the suite, unable to form the slightest inkling about what he's walking into. The floor-to-ceiling windows soar on top of the Los Angeles basin and encourage a blinding effect, especially after the conditioning of the dim corridor.

"You've been with me for many years, Mister Wrightson," the voice continues, "brought into this agency on the recommendation of a particular sort of colleague of mine. It was never clear for what purpose you were meant to serve. Yet, day in and day out, you punched the clock and filled your desk with trivial distractions. You brought your wife out here from the East Coast. The two of you made a girl and crafted a complete family life. You have lived, Mister Wrightson, as well as anyone can, all while you served me in waiting. Alas, I now know what to do with you."

Harry drops his head, acquiescent by some force. He stands in the heart of the cold, expansive room, his feet shift within peculiar swirls and ciphers etched into the marble. Harry's eyes attempt to adjust to the direct morning sunlight beaming into his face. Characters situated in front of the windows begin to form lithe edges and blackened centers.

One willowy silhouette slithers his hand, and the yellow light behind him seems to palpitate.

Harry tries to talk, only to find his mouth too painfully dry for his tongue and lips to function. A bead of sweat squeezes out of the crease on his forehead.

Harry looks down at his shoes, unsure of why he feels so goddamn uncomfortable. Straight at the floor, beneath his spit-shined shoes, Harry traces the incisions in the marble. His eyes bustle along each curve and indentation, and he becomes dizzy following the strange pattern of plumage.

He musters all of his nerve to look up at the indistinct figure backlit against the window. "I've been busy with preparations for the new agent starting today, sir. His office will be next to my own so I'll be able to better help him settle in," Harry says the best he can.

Hushed laughter sounds behind Harry. Footsteps edge closer. He wants to turn around and glance over his shoulder, but finds that he can't move.

"This is your last day here, Mister Wrightson," the featureless man intones.

"What? You're firing me?" Harry is shocked, his nerves clearly getting the best of him. He flashes back to the distinct fingernail scratches in the mahogany corridor.

"I assure you, it's not such a mundane act, Mister Wrightson. You see," the featureless man stirs, unable to mask his anticipation, "it has come to my attention that your grandfather in Allendale, New Jersey has died. A rational man would want to take leave and attend to matters."

Harry stutters, realizing his recent anxiety can be contributed to the emotional pain of a dead relative. Harry can't help himself. He chuckles.

"With all honesty, sir, I haven't yet decided what to do with my grandfather's estate," Harry says, his vocal cords loosened. "But, I thank you for your compassion."

"Estate?" laughs the featureless man. "I'd hardly refer to a wobbly shack built upon septic marshland much of an estate. Each to his own, I suppose."

"Wait. How did you know?" Harry dissects the suite, and finds the feminine outline of the occult woman from across the courtyard. His voyeuristic distraction is so close. Harry feels a strange sexual rouse even now. The sunlight distorted the window and swathed her body standing in front of it, and Harry couldn't see her until this moment. *Hold on, Kalila. I need to go, darling.*

She smiles sympathetically once their eyes meet.

What is she doing here? Harry thinks. The tension returns with a tingling fury as he fears a game is being played. *Is she going to channel my dead grandfather?*

Harry tries to move—to runaway or to charge forward with clenched fists—but his feet are locked to the symbol underneath. His suit weighs heavily on him, churning heat and sweat, clinging and bunching up in every way uncomfortable.

"Her name is Kalila, Mister Wrightson," the featureless man begins. "Much more than a luring collection of meat and bone, Kalila has been an invaluable asset of mine for many years, using her gift to scour the shadows for those who will reveal themselves to be of varying importance to me. Sometimes the reason takes time to become clear."

"Patience is a virtue, even to a creature as endless as you," Kalila speaks with a strong accent, her voice as womanly as her form.

"Kalila..." the featureless man raises his thin arm, fluttering the light beneath it with the occasional faint oblong circle and streak of color that darken the sun, "brought you to me because of an item you would come to possess. It is a special hand... severed from a barbarian thief of the two Sipparas and preserved in

tallow. It is a hand of glory, Mister Wrightson."

"I don't know what you're talking about," Harry cries. "I don't have anything like that!"

"But you do, Mister Wrightson, since your grandfather has died and his collection has become your own," the featureless man assures. "I have taken the necessary steps to guarantee that you transfer ownership of the hand to me."

"You're threatening me?" Harry struggles to move. "Why? Why can't I move? What's going on?"

Harry wrestles against the imperceptible restraint binding him to the demonic etching on the marble floor. His muscles undulate in desperation to draw him away, but he finds to all of his horror, a static force that counters his every twitch with a vice-like grip.

The featureless man's head turns into the sunlight to watch Kalila step forward.

"Poor, silly man, we're not threatening you," Kalila says. "We're offering you something lovely."

Kalila parades confidently across the floor over to Harry. She places her delicate hands on each side of his head, her dark fingers a splintered contrast to his colorless skin. Harry stops combating his escape. His chest still heaves with sharp pains, his intense sweat turns his skin cold and slippery, yet his limbs swiftly fall still at Kalila's touch. Harry holds his eyes onto hers. Her shiny black orbs are stunning and kind. Harry feels his pulse settle and coolness relieve his burning forehead.

Everything is going to be fine.

Kalila smiles at Harry. Then Harry screams with sanity thrashing abandon.

She leans in for a kiss; her tongue flits into Harry's contorted and agape mouth. She pulls her body tight with Harry, ensuring that her every curve finds firm resistance against Harry's tension, again distracting his terror with a conflicting sensation. His howls turn to mumbles, and then to silence.

Kalila purrs as she kisses him. Her hands cross into the sticky hair at the back of his head and her fingers tighten into a fist. She moves to Harry's neck and spills hot breath into his ear as she probes her tongue into him.

"Harry, I'm something like an angel," Kalila whispers.

The suite transpires into a mush around Harry, pliable and dripping like a melting room of wax, spilling yellow sunlight into blinding flares as the windows lose their frames. Harry liquefies, too, blending into the floor on his back, sliding with the ooze. All the while, Kalila hovers above him, soothing him with loving touches.

Everything is going to be fine.

The soft details of the room throb in a fever, and alter into the faint likeness of Harry's house. Harry is tangled in the sweaty sheets of his bed. He fights through the paralysis to rise.

Dragging the weight of his legs, Harry moves through the hallway of his house, alongside a row of family photographs, towards the kitchen and the tinny rumpus of morning cartoons. The kitchen is derelict, the side door outside partly open. There's a half eaten bowl of cereal in the sink, the discoloration of milk left

in a glass. Through the little window over the sink, Harry watches his little girl play in the front lawn.

The Plymouth Belvedere turns slowly around the corner of the block down the street. The engine surges and the car heaves forward, faster and faster, the deep power increases to the level of thunder, until the car jumps the curb and bounces over the sidewalk. It crashes into the little girl, destroying her frame in a sickening crunch.

"My little girl..." Harry mouths the words, too stunned for much sound or inflection.

Harry rushes from the window and though the side door. Into the front yard, he drops to his knees. He collects Matilda's bloodied and limp flesh from under the hissing grill of the car. Harry cries. A coldness seeps into his core as he looks upon his daughter's lifeless eyes, still abnormally round and large. She's gone, her eyes transfixed on Harry's, but seeing nothing.

The car door opens on the driver's side; the metal latch releases a crack in the world. Orson Theodore from Creve Coeur crunches the debris riddled grass with his neatly polished black leather shoes, careful not to let the spillage from the girl rise above his tread. He looks down at Harry and cocks his head to side at the gentleness in how he cradles his daughter. Orson flares a match to light his cigarette.

"It's nice to finally meet, you Mister Wrightson. I have every confidence that I'll move into your position without much in the way of kinks. I was thinking I might slide the marsh fern away from the window and over to where the coat rack stands," Orson exhales yellow smoke and extends his hand.

Harry can't speak. He can't cry any longer. He's numb.

The passenger door of the car opens, this time the softest of sounds. Kalila moves ethereally around the gory front of the car. She kneels beside Harry and his dead girl in the grass, and for the longest time, she does nothing but watch them. Kalila is saddened as she places her hand on Matilda's forehead.

"Everything is going to be fine, Harry," Kalila tells him warmly.

Kalila positions her arms under the girl. It's not until she steals the child off Harry's lap that he notices anything or anyone else in his front yard. Harry stares into the ether, inactive and disorientated while Kalila carries Matilda's flaccid body to the backseat of the Belvedere.

Norma is propped up in a relaxed position in the back, her throat slit days ago leaving the spilled blood down her front time to coagulate and turn putrid black. Kalila places Matilda besides her mother.

Orson flicks the smoldering tip of his cigarette on the lawn, and then swoops behind the wheel. His door slams, and he's ready to go. Kalila stands and watches Harry for a moment longer, though, knowing that Harry will not be able to move, even as his murdered family is driven away from him.

Kalila sits in the car and closes the door. Latch.

Harry wakes up on the floor. The light in the suite is more than blinding now, it's painful. He clinches his eyes shut and rolls over to his side, curling his limbs up tight. It's all so real for him now. They are dead. Harry feels it. He remembers it.

"I want the hand, Mister Wrightson," The featureless man speaks.

"I don't know where it is. I don't know if I have it," Harry whimpers.

"Give me everything, and I will give you everything in return," the featureless man speaks. "I will give you back your family."

"They're dead..." Harry says.

Kalila touches Harry softly. She is so soft, so caring, that Harry can't resist wrapping himself into her lap, despite knowing better than to seek comfort from one of his pitiless manipulators. She strokes his hair.

"Give us everything your grandfather possessed, everything he had collected in his house. We will find what we are looking for, and then we will return your family," Kalila tells Harry.

"But you can't," he says. "You killed them."

"Harry," Kalila smiles at him. "I know a special trick. Do you remember the Celery Farm?"



He left his car where the paved road ends. Harry is on foot the rest of the way to the house. The ground is already wet with the sewage of the lake. An army of insects buzz inharmoniously, sight unseen.

Harry notices a black and white warbler through the thicket of overgrowth. He remembers these tiny birds from his youth and the summers spent with his grandparents; their abundance in the marsh has always bordered on becoming a plague.

The bird flutters away, suddenly, spooked by a distant noise.

Was that laughter? Harry thinks. He follows the direction of the bird, compelled to stay after it for some reason he doesn't pause to give himself. Through the purple flourishes and reed grass, Harry sinks ankle deep into the muddy edge of the foul water.

The woodland is around the bend, just past the barberry. Harry looks up and catches sight of a blackbird gliding towards the tree line. The bird squawks, ineffectively masking the hint of something else in the breeze – Laughter. The blackbird disappears on a branch.

This is where Harry needs to go, along a path further away from the house.

Harry remembers that laugh. It was Christmas morning, 1965. He had purchased an expensive necklace from a department store display case that he found Norma lingering around. When she opened the gift that early morning, all she could do was laugh. Harry always did love her.

A gust of wind flounces through the cattails ahead of Harry. The whistle is melodic and sweet, and Harry hears his little girl call his name, the same jubilant way she did every night when he walked through the front door of his house after a day at the office.

"Daddy!"

Harry lifts his feet out of the mud. He hikes north, stepping over the invasive multiflora, towards the wooded trees where the birds wait for him and caw.





About this Story: A Word from the Author

Richard Matheson is a legendary writer. It's really as simple as that. From fantasy to horror to some of the most memorable teleplays ever produced, Matheson is an innovator of concept and execution. I could easily take this time to meander into a catalog raving about any number of particular novels or standout episodes of *The Twilight Zone*, in which case such praise would indeed be validated. But then, I assume most of you are already familiar with many of these stories, if not in print form, then film and television.

It was Matheson's short story collection that stirred my interest when it came time to sit down and write this fourth entry into new Wormwood project. I had read a menacing little short story titled The Holiday Man, in which a businessman dreads going into the office on Labor Day. I won't spoil the details of his job, but will say that it's a stunner in controlled scope. Reading through several more short stories, I found it impossible not to latch onto Matheson's voice, particularly back in the fifties and sixties, as he was hitting his early stride writing wicked morality chapters and downright horrific fantasy tales.

I took to the web to find out more about the man, but other than numerous listings of his innumerable accolades, there really isn't much beyond the hard to resist inventories of his novels and screenplays. What I did find is the name of his hometown. Allendale, New Jersey. While there isn't much in the way of shadowy town secrets to uncover or a peculiar occult history of the land, there is the

nearby nature preserve/bird watcher's sanctuary known as the Celery Farm.

And the mind stirs... I knew that I wanted to pepper in nods to Matheson's own work here and there, and so I did. I also wanted to reflect changes in style and content over the years, switching from horror to sentimentality, even a transgression or two into sexuality, as Matheson employed in Hell House.

I'm a fan of Richard Matheson. Being able to write my own story as a nod to his work has been a challenge, but one that fortunately resulted in a final sense of accomplishment.

As for the insight into the sad story of Harry Wrightson—I opt to keep the details limited, and instead offer a catalog of a few standout novels:

I Am Legend (1954)

The Shrinking Man (1956)

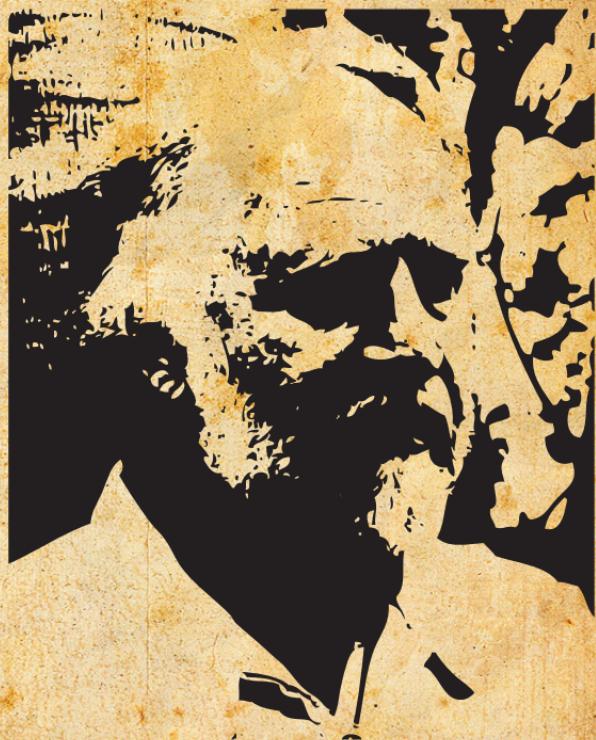
A Stir of Echoes (1958)

Hell House (1971)

And of course, any short story collection or episode of *The Twilight Zone* you can get your hands on. As for the film adaptations, use caution.

-- Jeremy Rogers

Los Angeles, August 2009



Richard Matheson



Instructions for making a Hand of Glory

1. Go to a gallows near a highway or crossroads and cut off a hand (preferably the right hand) of a hanged felon.
2. "Using a strip of the burial shroud to wring it dry of any remaining blood, you then put the hand into an earthenware pot, filled with a concoction of herbs and spices, and left it to marinate for two weeks."
3. Take it out and expose it to bright sunlight until it is dry. If it is not a sunny day, it is permissible to heat the hand in an oven along with vervain and fern.
4. Make a candle out of the fat of a hanged man, ponie (probably horse dung), sesame, and virgin wax. The dead man's hair should be used to make the wick.
5. Place the candle between the fingers on the hand.

Coming Soon from
Wormwood: A Serialized Mystery

Season 3, Vol. 1 - Wormwood & the Five Fingers of Glory

This five-part audio story anthology features thrilling pulp tales of Wormwood's Hand of Glory as it passes through the ages -- with a surprising twist that leads to a shocking Season Three revelation!

Season 3, Vol. 2 - Wormwood: Portraits

The denizens of Wormwood are a mysterious breed. This series of stand-alone vignettes delves into the untold secrets of the various characters featured on Wormwood, even as the town reaches its darkest hours...

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All is revealed in "Revelation," the final epic arc of the award-winning podcast drama. Centuries-old mysteries are finally exposed to the light as the final fate of Wormwood is decided.



The Hand of Glory...

In occult lore, the Hand was cut from the corpse of a hanged thief and coated in virgin wax and the dead man's tallow. It is said to open any door. But how did the Hand of Glory come to have its fate entwined with the mysteries at the heart of Wormwood?

Discover the secrets of this arcane appendage once attached to occult detective Doctor Xander Crowe as we present: *Wormwood and the Five Fingers of Glory*; five thrilling tales of mystery and suspense that span the ages!

