

Kevin Malone

The Urth list — 6 messages, 5 voices, 25 Feb 1999

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/1389>

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Tony Ellis — 25 Feb 1999, 10:18

Roy wrote:

I just finished re-re-reading "Kevin Malone", from `_Endangered_Species_`.

A gem of a story, which I've often re-read purely for the pleasure of doing so. And I have no intention of spoiling it for you or for anyone else, but here are a couple of hints:

What I would like to know is: who did what to whom, and why? Is KM a ghost, or just what he purports to be?

He's neither.

What relationship did the murder victim have to KM? Neither KM nor Priest actually refer to her as KM's mother. The incident is related in response to a query about KM going to an orphanage. And what are we to make of the narrator's parting hunch that both murderer and victim being named Malone may be coincidental? Answers anyone?

There -is- no relationship between Kevin and Betty Malone. Once you understand that it all falls into place: Kevin Malone -thinks- Betty Malone and the elder Mr Malone were married, -thinks- that he was their child in the lost Eden of the house in its heyday. But if the names are just coincidental, and there -was- no child, that cuts his whole fantasy off at the root. In which case, where -do- his childhood memories of the big house come from? And the longing to recreate that lost world which has driven his whole life?

Think about that, and think about the narrator wondering in the very last line of the story, if it might be possible "for a man, even a very rich man, to be possessed and not to know it."

Roy C. Lackey — 26 Feb 1999, 02:01 · follows Tony Ellis

Tony Ellis wrote:

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I hope these questions were not rhetorical. :-) If there was no child, then who is Kevin Malone? Where did (does) the money come from to buy and maintain the estate? If any of the testimony of the narrative is to be trusted, then a maid named Betty Malone was murdered and someone,

who may or may not have been the murderer, committed suicide in consequence thereof. Why was she murdered, and by whom? What bearing does that have on Kevin, or the current "young couple"?

In this story, again, there are two Wolfe characters - the narrator and Kevin - who are misogynists.

And what about the "young couple"? Why does Marcella remain?

As far as "spoilers" go, in the archives I believe it is stated that all readers of this list are presumed to be familiar with the corpus of Wolfe's work. Is that not so?

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Possessed by whom or what? Spoil it for me, by private e-mail if you wish.

Roy

Peter Westlake — 27 Feb 1999, 15:48 · follows Roy C. Lackey

At 10:18 1999-02-25 +0000, Tony wrote:

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I've read this story more than once, and had very little recollection of it. This discussion prompted me to read it again, and it's as though I was reading it for the first time. Everything is suddenly crystal clear - though I shall check with Tony to see that I've got it right! If so, then I think it's quite clear-cut, too, not like some other stories we've talked about here ...

Roy, Tony - thank you!

Peter.

William H. Ansley — 01 Mar 1999, 00:02 · follows Peter Westlake

Tony Ellis <tony.ellis at futurenet.co.uk> said:

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And in response Peter Westlake <peter at harlequin.co.uk> said:

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Boy, oh boy, do I feel stupid!

I have read "Kevin Malone" again, twice, with all these hints and I still don't know who or what is possessing Kevin Malone.

Tony Ellis, please enlighten me, by private email, of course.

William Ansley

Allan Lloyd — 02 Apr 1999, 08:52 · follows William H. Ansley

Hello, this is my first posting to the Urth list so be gentle with me. I was tempted out of lurker status by the discussion of Kevin Malone. It was entertaining to watch two opposing views of the story being debated, but I couldn't help feeling that both had been distracted by a typical Wolfeian red herring. This story is to me one of Gene's more obvious Christian parables. The clues in the text are almost too many to mention, the most blatant being the butler's name, Priest. The house is compared to a Renaissance palace which should have a "red robed cardinal descending the steps." The "beautiful" couple's first meal is lamb in aspic, the breakfast is eggs Benedict. The garden is full of roses, and the first time we see Kevin Malone, he is weeding the garden (removing plants that fail the test?). The couple are being tested for their suitability to join the ranks of the family (of God), hence all of the servants who have already undergone the test have the same name, Malone. After a summer of paradise, the strain in their relationship exposes their lack of love, and they react in different ways. The wife offers her body to the butler and is gently refused, but the narrator threatens Priest with being thrown into the fire, a particularly Biblical bit of violence, and thus fails the test, leading to his expulsion from the garden. When Kevin Malone appears he bursts through the window in a gust of wind, with a mention of spirits and ghosts. When telling his story he mentions being brought up in a room over a stable, and makes reference to "supper at a long table" not being for him. When he talks of the murder of Betty Malone he mentions bloody rags and a hammer, with all the links with

the crucifixion, and although they don't know where she is buried, she is with them in the garden (resurrection). I think that the talk who committed the murder is not relevant, there are few clues in the text as to how or why she died, but the important thing is that both she and her murderer have been forgiven (she for having been a "tramp"). Kevin Malone himself is portrayed as a character with faults, especially misogyny, but he has given up his wealth to serve others, as have the other servants who have obviously been previously tested in the same way as the current couple. (There are 24 of them, perhaps two sets of twelve disciples.) The wife sits at the feet of Malone, and symbolically dies when she passes out at his feet. She is reborn with a hangover next day, and joins the family, while the husband leaves the house and is last seen searching for meaning but failing to find enlightenment. The final sentence, with its repetition of the phrase "rich man" refers to the parable concerning camels and eyes of needles, and seems to be saying that a rich man can be possessed by the spirit of God and earn himself a place in the Kingdom of God by serving others. The final argument lies in the names. Malone is an old Irish name meaning "follower of Saint John", so all the servants have the same name. Marcella is the female form of Mark, another apostle, and Kevin means "beautiful one". I hope this makes some kind of sense, and is worthy of inclusion here. Could I say that reading the archives has brought a wealth of new meanings and appreciation for me to the works of Wolfe, and please keep up the good work,
Allan Lloyd

Roy C. Lackey — 03 Apr 1999, 19:20 · follows Allan Lloyd

Welcome, Allan Lloyd!

As one of the "two opposing views" I feel obligated to respond, but I hardly know where to begin. Someone said I had "too many Malones"! I don't understand why you state that "all the servants have the same name". The current servants certainly don't.

You also seem to be mixing mythologies. On one hand you have Kevin in the role of Yahweh in The Garden, then as a Christ-like figure. Not to mention Betty in the role of Jesus with the crucifixion/resurrection allusions.

Nor do I see any evidence in the text to support the notion that Marcella has suddenly "seen the light", so to speak, and found God. If a hangover was the hallmark of salvation, then atheists the world over would stop drinking! <g>

Finally, the phrase "rich man" only occurs once in the last sentence, at least in my edition. Don't be discouraged; only those who stick their necks out risk decollation, and I was never even an apprentice in the Order of the Seekers for Truth and Penitence.

Say, you didn't happen to read the Gilligan's Island stuff in the archives, did you? <G>

Roy