

"KM" defense II

The Urth list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 07 Mar 1999

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Roy C. Lackey — 07 Mar 1999, 02:39

On 3-4-99 Tony Ellis wrote:

Once again: since the story doesn't tell us one way or the other whether the elder Malone grew up on the estate, it can't matter. We're not supposed to know precisely what memories KM has or believes he has. All we need to know is that he thinks he's the son of Betty and the elder Malone, and that there never was a son.<<

But we do know what memories he claims. He states that his father was the "man-of-all-work", his mother the "parlor maid" (p-45). He does not state that he was the son of the dead couple. The elder Malone was the "stableman".

The narrator says of the staff-photo he is shown: "Two dozen people, most of them in livery of one kind or another, ..." (p-40) This is not mere verbal ornamentation by Wolfe; it is a clue. Twenty-four people to service an estate occupied by two people is overkill. That they are in livery indicates that they wear "uniforms" appropriate to their peculiar stations. A gardener wears different clothing from a chauffeur or stableman. Presumably a parlor maid wears clothing that distinguishes her from other maids. There is something of a caste system involved and one servant does not perform the services that are properly the domain of another, as in certain trade unions. The Pines is built on an Italian model, but the servants are stereotypically British. My point here is that with such a large staff, each position is discrete. A man-of-all-work is not a stableman.

KM's memories of growing up on the estate are just what he says they are, and he went into the orphanage because his parents "lost their places". Yes, he is possessed, but by the estate itself. Which is what happened to Marcella, as well.

Tony also wrote:

.... No offense, but your explanation turns a fine,

insidiously creepy story into something pretty flat.<g> <<

How so? Our fundamental disagreement is only over who/what does the possessing, not the fact of it. My idea accounts for Marcella's otherwise inexplicable behavior at the end of the story.

Roy

Tony Ellis — 08 Mar 1999, 17:41 · follows Roy C. Lackey

Roy wrote:

But we do know what memories he claims. He states that his father was the "man-of-all-work", his mother the "parlor maid" (p-45). He does not state that he was the son of the dead couple. The elder Malone was the "stableman".

You're suggesting that as well as the elder Malone and Betty Malone, there were another -two- Malones on the estate who were KM's parents. To have two Malones on an estate may be considered a coincidence; to have four begins to sound like contrivance. Why do they all have to be called Malone? Why didn't Gene Wolfe call Betty and her murderer Derby and Joan, and avoid needless confusion? And why does the narrator not find any mention of your two Malones, or their child, when he researches KM's story? Most of all, why are we set up to think that the elder Malone and Betty were KM's parents, and why are we then carefully told at the end of story that they weren't? If KM has always "known" they weren't, what was the point?

The answer to all those questions is that there weren't four Malones on the estate as you suggest, there were two, as the story tells us. Betty Malone and her murderer have the same name so that KM can think they were his parents, and we are told that this was coincidental so that we can realise he's wrong.

A man-of-all-work is not a stableman.

I'm not sure I share your certainty, but I don't think it matters anyway. Priest, I seem to recall, says that the murder happened before his time. He's certainly telling the "story" of the murder, as it has come down to him, and in the telling perhaps Malone the man-of-all-work has become Malone the stableman. Kevin Malone, being so much closer to the source, doesn't make this mistake. Just a thought.

Yes, he is possessed, but by the estate itself.

I did consider this once, but it doesn't really tie in with the details of the story. Why did the estate "want" to possess Kevin Malone? If we were told that the place burned down after the murder, or was converted into a theme park, we could perhaps understand why it would want to possess someone and make them rebuild it, but as the facts of the story stand, why should the estate bother? And why does KM want so badly to live as a servant, and sleep in the servant's quarters of the house he owns? Doesn't that sound more like someone who is possessed by a specific person, rather than a whole estate?

I think I've now said all that I want to about "Kevin Malone", and then some. If everyone else on this list hasn't got fed up with posts on this subject, I know I have. Read the story, folks.