



Twilight Study #6757 by Sean Murphy.

# Leviathan

## Chapter 62

By Sean Hugh Murphy

*Chapter 62 occurs midway through Sean Murphy's novel-in-progress, an epic coming-of-age story of Patrick Riley, who was born in Manhattan, spent his infancy and early childhood in the Bronx, school years in the woods of early suburban central New Jersey, and later hitch-hiked out west, until returning east to spend his early adult life in upstate New York, eventually settling on the coast of Maine. It follows young Patrick's awakening to the world during the turbulent sixties and seventies, his journey inward (and outward) in search of truth, the overcoming of personal and familial tragedy, the discovery of joy and love, and ultimately the forgiveness and redemption that comes in time to those who persevere. This chapter shows a chance meeting that makes a deep impression on Patrick, age fifteen, as he settles into a new town.*

Inside Tony's Pizzeria, the counter guy lifted chairs up onto tables. He swept the floor, turned the lights low and flipped the closed sign outward.

"Damn, they're closed," said Bobby.

"What time is it?" said Jay-Jay.

"Nine-thirty," said Patrick. "What do you guys want to do?"

"Let's go behind the garage and see if anyone's hanging out," said Bobby.

Patrick and Jay-Jay followed Bobby around the right side of the pizzeria and through the gap between the back of the restaurant and the end of the low slung multiple-bay garages, darkened by shadows at the rear of the juvenile detective bureau. Patrick looked at the row of seven closed, windowless garage doors, and wondered how many hid police cars behind them.

The three boys walked quickly into the second alley, beside the garage. They passed through to the rear, where a crowd of about twenty people sat at the top of a long, narrow set of simple steps. The steps, two feet wide and made of crumbling concrete, as though they had been constructed long ago in another time, led down to a large, empty parking lot, twenty feet below. The ground sloped downward steeply to the lot, and trees stood dormant on either side of the steps, a small grove of ashen saplings, bark covered with soot, the underbrush barren and flattened by the trodding of feet. A dense packet of these sickly-looking trees grew on the slope on either side of the sitting area, adding to the secluded but somehow neglected feeling, as though this small location had been forgotten by the rest of the world. It had the feel of a low raptor's lookout; people hunkered down on concrete blocks on either side of the steps. Steeped in dark shadow, this was a covert scene; a hideaway, a party spot.

Patrick turned a concrete block on end and sat down quietly at the edge of the crowd. He looked out across the parking lot to the basketball court in the opposite corner, where he'd seen people hanging out earlier in the evening. He squinted his eyes to see, but it was too far and too dark to tell if anyone still loitered there.

A short, bear-shaped figure, backlit by streetlights below, approached Patrick from the side, climbing over a few scraps of boards piled up against the back of the garage.

"Hey, is that you One-Eye?" said the bear.

"Hi Ceci, how's it going?"

"Ahh-ite One-Eye. How you doin'?" she said.

She sat down on a block and grunted. Patrick could see her face now. She smiled; a big, toothy grin. She seemed more relaxed than when he had last seen her, by the bench at the high school.

Ceci had startled him by using the nickname One-Eye. Patrick hoped sincerely that it wouldn't stick. She said it with great affection, though, and genuinely seemed to like him.

"You guys hang out back here a lot?" he said.

"Yeah, sometimes. It's a good spot. The juvi cops go home at five o'clock, and they're gone until Monday. Nobody ever comes up here on the weekend."

She picked up a small stone and chucked it down the hill onto the parking lot.

Patrick's eyes began to adjust to the shadows behind the garage. He could see Bobby talking with Michael Magliafari. Jay-Jay laughed with some people that Patrick didn't recognize. Several in the group smoked cigarettes, the red embers glowing hot and then cooling arrhythmically.

One-quart bottles of beer passed from hand to hand in the darkness. Ceci passed one to Patrick, and he took a few gulps. The beer was cold, kept that way by the cool, late-autumn air.

"What happened to your eye, man?" she said, her face suddenly serious.

Patrick looked down.

"Oh, nothing. I had a bunch of operations. The doctors messed them up," he said.

"Sorry to hear that. We got your back now, man. You come find me if anyone gives you any trouble, ahh-ite? We'll protect you."

"Thanks." Patrick nodded.

"You gonna be ahh-ite, One-Eye. Don't worry, man."

She drank down a few swigs more from the quart bottle, and passed it to the person to her immediate left. Ceci got up in one creaking motion; more like rolling off the concrete block than rising.

Just then Michael Magliafari cupped his hands around his mouth and yelled to an old man walking across the far side of the parking lot.

"Love-ly! Hey, Love-ly!"

The old man stood straight up with a start under the street lamp, and raised his hands up in the air as though praising God in a gospel choir, his back arched, his chest thrust upward.

"Lovely day; lovely I say!" the old man shouted to the night sky.

"Hey, Love-ly; come on up here, man," Magliafari barked through his cupped hands. He waved his

arms in an exaggerated motion so the old man could see him.

Lovely peered into the darkness at the top of the hill, where the group sat drinking and laughing. He put his hands up as a visor against the fluorescent light of the street lamp, and craned his neck to see.

Several people giggled as the old man changed direction and shuffled toward them. When he reached the steps he took them one at a time, pausing at each step, his stooped frame leaning against the thin iron-pipe handrail for support. As he reached the top of the stairs, Magliafari approached him directly.

"Love-ly; how's it going man? You got your harmonica with you?"

"Oh, yeah. I never go anywhere without that." The old man chuckled.

Patrick could see him a little better now. He had to be in his late sixties or early seventies, and looked to have lived a long life of hard work. The man seemed cheerful, even if stooped. He obviously struggled to walk and stand in his stiff old body. He wore dark pants and dress shoes, and a rough-looking, thin leather jacket over a collared rayon shirt. His skin was dark, and a scruffy afro goatee framed his yellowed teeth when he smiled. On his head he wore a tattered Yankees hat.

Two people stood up and made room for Lovely to sit. Everyone's attention turned to the old man as he shuffled toward one of the vacated concrete blocks and carefully lowered himself down onto it.

Patrick watched his face closely.

"Hey, Love-ly. Play us some harmonica," said Michael.

"You all have something for an old man to eat?"

"Yeah, man. We can probably find you something. You want some fried chicken?" said Michael.

"That sounds good. Thank you very much young man."

"Anything for you, Love-ly. We'll be back in a jiff. Okay, y'all. Come on, now. We need some money so Mr. Love-ly here can eat. We need some more beer, too. Everybody pitch in two dollars, and we should have enough."

A few quiet grumbles fell into the air as people reached into their pockets. Magliafari milled around the group, collecting the crumpled bills and straightening them out in his hands. He grabbed Patrick's two dollars and turned toward the alley between the juvenile detective garage and Tony's Pizza.

"I'll be right back. Don't go anywhere, Love-ly.

We're going to get you some chicken and beer so you can play tight, ahh-ite?"

"All right," said Lovely.

The old man said it with the same tone and inflection as the younger kids said ahh-ite. Same expression, but he pronounced the consonants and distinct words.

All Right.

It meant hello, goodbye, thank you, respect, and a hundred other things, depending on how you said it and whom you were talking to.

As Michael left to get the beer and chicken, people resumed their talking and laughing and horsing around at the top of the fifty stairs leading down to the alternative high school's parking lot.

It seemed like an ongoing party to Patrick, like this was a way of life up here. It reminded him of hanging out in front of the Hathaway sisters' house in Endville during the previous summer. It had the same feel of freedom and safety, but markedly more urban and gritty. It felt like the Bronx, soot and dirt in the air, electric with possible danger. It felt safe that night, though, surrounded by friends in the darkness.

The beer, on top of the home-made wine that he, Jay-Jay, and Bobby had drunk earlier, just up the street in Labaluster's grandfather's garage, had begun to lull Patrick into a very relaxed state of mind, one in which he felt neither pain nor fear. His mind was numb to the chronic confusions and anxieties he usually felt. He fit in with this new group. They didn't ask anything of him. They accepted him almost immediately, without question. It was comfortable and easy. He felt no pressure to be or say anything at all.

Ceci walked over and sat down between Lovely and Patrick, stepping again over the sloppily stacked boards leaned up against the rear of the garage. She reached over and rubbed Lovely's back affectionately.

"Hey Love-ly. How you doin', hon?"

"Oh, I can't complain. I can't complain." He said it twice.

"You doin' okay? You got retirement money coming in? Food stamps?" she asked.

"I used to work for the town, cleaning up the parks," he said.

"I remember, from when I was a kid," she said.

"Uh huh. I worked doing that for thirty years. I used to work for the railroad before that. I worked in the mill for a while with my father when I was young. Yep, yep. That was a long time ago, though."

He smiled a warm, broad smile, and a deep, rich presence and kindness filled his eyes. He clearly enjoyed the company and attention.

About ten minutes later Magliafari reappeared from the alley with a cardboard box filled with six one-quart bottles of beer and two containers of fried chicken. He put the box down on an unoccupied, upturned block, and took out one container of chicken. He walked the chicken over to Lovely and handed it to him. Lovely reached up with both of his slender black hands and gently took the container.

"You'll play us a few songs on the harmonica, right? After you eat?" said Michael.

Lovely nodded as he opened the container and began to devour the chicken. He ate like a man who hadn't eaten in a while, ravenously, licking his bony fingers after each piece to savor it more fully.

Michael took a few pieces out of the second container for himself, and then passed it around the other way. He opened one of the bottles of Olde English 800 malt liquor, twisting off its aluminum cap, and washed down a mouthful.

He handed the bottle to Lovely.

"Here you go, Love-ly."

"Thank you. Thank you."

Lovely took a long guzzling drink from the bottle, a little desperately, like he might not get more. When he finished the first guzzle, he belched loudly. Then he drank down three or four more long gulps, put the bottle between his feet with a thunk, and finished off the last piece of chicken.

He licked the remaining bits of grease and fat from the fingers of his left hand, and he leaned down and picked up the bottle again with his right, and took another long swig.

As if on cue, Magliafari appeared behind him and handed him a cigarette, and lit a match. The old man cupped his hands to keep the wind from blowing it out. A few puffs of smoke drifted up and hung momentarily in the cold night air. Magliafari sat down on the empty block, to Lovely's right, and lit a cigarette himself. A thick moment of satisfaction filled the darkness behind the garage as the beer and food and cigarettes had their effect on the group of partiers.

"Life is good, isn't it, Love-ly?"

"Lovely," said Lovely.

"You have a song for us, friend?" said Michael.

"Sure 'nough," he said.

A light wind skittered a single dried leaf across the smooth, hardened, well-worn dirt. The leaf came to rest between the old man's shoes.

Lovely pulled a harmonica from his right coat pocket and looked it over. He tapped it against his palm a few times to knock out any debris, and reached down for the quart of beer between his feet. He drank down the rest of the quart, and then held it up against the streetlight below and looked at the dribble in the bottom of the bottle.

"You don't have any more beer, do you?" he said hopefully.

"Sure, my man. Hey, Lovely needs more beer. Cough it up."

Michael reached back and snapped his fingers at someone sitting directly behind him. A near-full bottle appeared from the shadows behind Michael, thrust forth by a black hand. Michael grabbed the bottle and passed it to Lovely.

The old man took a swig, and then poured

a stream of beer into the harmonica, first into one side, and then the other.

Michael laughed.

"I gots to choke it down," said Lovely. "This here helps me choke it down."

"What, the chicken?" said Michael. Ceci laughed.

"The harp gets a little stiff. This here helps me choke it down," said Lovely.

He poured another sloppy splash of beer into the harmonica, and enthusiastically plugged the harp into his mouth and sucked the beer out of it. The harmonica wheezed at first as he pulled air across the reeds.

Patrick's ears perked up at the sound.

Lovely's back straightened like a rod as he warmed up the harp. The music sounded like the wailing of a dog at first, howling from loneliness or hunger, too long tied to a stake in the yard, too often beaten by an unkind master. The old man transformed into another person before their eyes.



*Twilight Study #7058 by Sean Murphy.*

A rhythm started and grew into an organic machine, like a slow train clanking on tracks, made of soul; flesh and bone. Lovely's foot started tapping, first this way, and then that, on a perfectly timed offbeat to the harmonica's deeply felt crescendos and diminutions; the old man's song filling the night.

Then, as rain will sometimes just appear out of air, without wind or storm to carry it in, when the dew point hits just the right spot, the whole group on top of the hill, behind the garage, at the top of the stairs, began to stomp and yelp, and clap their hands in a perfectly synchronized and syncopated rhythm to the old man's wail.

Lovely picked up on the flush of feeling and soared with it, and now stomping his feet, and raising his knees high between each downbeat, rocking back and forth like Ray Charles or Stevie Wonder, abandoned himself to each ecstatic, joyful and sorrowful measure.

Patrick couldn't believe his ears. The memory of the music that Mrs. Shimansky, his grade school music teacher, had instilled in him came rushing forward; the attention to detail and breathing; focusing on the rhythm and timing with fluid acceptance, not forcing any wooden, mechanical control on any part of the expression. Patrick found himself clapping and rocking with everyone else, letting the old man lead them, loving him for giving so much of himself to that sound, feeling it in every part of himself, the downbeats and offbeats, the breath and the breathing.

And then Lovely sang.

*On down the road (clap, clap)  
Where dreams are born (clap, clap)  
I met the Devil (clap clap)  
He was full of scorn (clap clap)*

*He looked at me (clap clap)  
With that old evil eye (clap clap)  
He tried to steal my soul (clap clap)  
All I could do was cry (clap clap)*

The old man seemed transfixed now with joy, as if he had risen completely above his worldly circumstance, transcended every pain he'd ever felt, left them behind with all memory of awful history, and all worry for the future and its inevitable outcomes. The whole bloody world fell away from that old man's soul as he dug deeper into the music and the sound. Everyone else rocked and smiled, clapping with devotion to him and his song, each line punctuated with the moan of harmonica.

*Then from the east (clap clap)  
Came a thundercloud (clap clap)  
Sweet Jesus lightning (clap clap)  
Called my name out loud (clap clap)*

*And the thunder growled (clap clap)  
And the rain did pour (clap clap)  
And that old Devil (clap clap)  
I ain't seen him no more (clap clap)*

And Lovely played the harmonica like a fierce growling dog, seven generations wild, all teeth and bloody snot and gruesome, vicious truth.

And then he played like a child swept up in a perfect day, where excitement and pure joy washed over him.

Patrick was entranced. He felt himself in a dream of contentment like none he'd ever experienced, one in which he felt he could not move for fear of waking or disturbing the spell.

And just as Patrick became aware of it, the old man came back down, and a sudden peacefulness settled on the people sitting at the top of the stairs, behind the juvenile detective bureau garage, above the parking lot of the alternative high school, just up the street from Patrick's family's new apartment in this new town and his new home.

And as mysteriously as this old man had appeared, and they had soared with him on wings of music into utter bliss, the music came to the softest and quietest of endings, like a small bird landing, hovering for a moment above the ground on a cushion of air, and settling almost imperceptibly down. The old man sat still for a long moment in the silence. Every person there looked at the life around them with a quiet sense of wonder. Someone whistled a long, soft, dry whistle.

"Wow," said Patrick.

The old man sighed a deep, heaving sigh. He shifted his frame on the concrete block, shook his head and chuckled.

"It's a lovely day," he said. "Love-ly I say."

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*Sean Murphy, COA's webmaster, has been a staff member for twenty-one years. As part of his work toward a BA in human ecology, he has been attending Bill Carpenter's ongoing Advanced Fiction tutorial. More of Sean's photographs can be seen at [www.seanmurphyphotography.com](http://www.seanmurphyphotography.com); his music can be heard at [smallerthancLOUDS.com](http://smallerthancLOUDS.com).*