

Ending Rewrite by Cara Clark of "Paul's Case" by Willa Cather

*In "Paul's Case" by Willa Cather, the title character is a loner who is often misunderstood. Paul's only solace comes from working as an usher at the theater where he is temporarily able to immerse himself in an atmosphere of fine music, expensive clothing, and interesting people before returning to his mundane life. After trying to attend a lavish party at a hotel, Paul gathers the courage to run away to New York, and steals his father's money to support himself. Paul is able to experience the high life for a few days, but when he learns his father and the police are looking for him, Paul contemplates if he is ready to end it all.*

*The following is my own version of the ending starting with Paul standing in front of the tracks as the train approaches.*

He stood watching the approaching locomotive, his teeth chattering, his lips drawn away from them in a frightened smile. When the right moment came he jumped. Nothing about it felt right. It was as if his whole body hung in the air entirely too long, and Paul was left waiting for the moment to happen.

As he descended Paul wondered if he had not timed his jump accurately. Did he only imagine the sound of the train and jump to suspend the suspense of his departure? Everything had been planned; everything seemed right. Now as he lay falling, Paul realized he only wished for it to be over.

He moved his hands and could feel the gravel under him, but he never felt the impact of hitting. Scared to know what he might see, Paul kept his eyes clinched shut. Was he already

dead; stuck somewhere between good and bad forced to figure out for himself where he was meant to land? No true place in life, and no true place in death felt fitting, and oddly comforting.

Would this unknown place have music though? He could make it without the fine silks, carriage rides, and champagne, but would not make it long without his music. The more he thought about not having it, the more panicked Paul became. He had become so panicked he did not realize the hum of a cello playing nearby. He fell motionless at the thought of realizing he was not alone, but finally calm enough to open his eyes.

The sky was the bluest he had ever seen, and there was not a cloud in his sight. He could not get up as it felt as if someone was sitting on his chest. Frightened, Paul struggled more and more to get up, but to no end. He then noticed the harder he fought the softer the cello became.

As he lay still on the ground, more and more of the orchestra began to chime in. Building up a section at a time, but never outdoing the first cello. As it built Paul knew it was easily the most beautiful arrangement he had ever heard. With each bar tears began to slowly roll down his cheek, warming his face until they dropped down to the ground as if they were part of the percussion section themselves.

He felt something strike his chest, and then realized his whole body was wet. The orchestra ceased to be heard, and was now replaced with the sounds of horses trotting, and people's chatter. Paul slowly opened his eyes, but the blue sky had turned to night. Realizing he was free to sit up, he began to scan his surroundings. He was alone in an alley, but something felt familiar about this dark place.

He stood to his feet to realize his shoes were gone, but also his jacket and the little bit of money he had in his pocket. As he walked out of the alley shivering, Paul began to realize where he was. He had not made it to the train, or to New York, or home; he had not even made it fifty feet from outside of the hotel.

Everything he wanted had seemed tangible, like the fairy world of a Christmas pantomime, but mocking spirits had stood guard at the doors. As the rain beat on his face, Paul wondered whether he was destined always to shiver in the black night outside, looking up to everyone else.