

THE BOOKSTORE

Written by

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The squeaky wheels of a cart stop and start.

INT. BOOKSTORE - DAY

A cramped shop where a tidy brand of chaos keeps thousands of books in their place.

A MAN darts between the shelves pushing a cart full of books, a slightly distressed expression in his keen eyes.

It's the owner of *Blinding Dust of Earth Books*, WINSTON BECKS (35). He's passionately dutiful and considers every book in the shop a member of his family.

Deeply uncool eyeglasses, haircut and wardrobe cement the image of a man who doesn't spend much time with people outside of business hours.

A well-to-do regular customer, MRS. LITTLETON (75)--the *only* customer--waits serenely at the front counter.

Winston aims worried glances at her in between rapid scans of the shelves. He abandons the cart and hunts high and low.

WINSTON

It won't be but a moment, Mrs.
Littleton. It's right here...
(to himself)
... somewhere.

His eyes narrow as he scurries through the shop with mounting anxiety, dragging his fingers across the titles.

WINSTON (CONT'D)

I just saw it last week sometime.
Please, help yourself to a sweet.

Mrs. Littleton plucks a candy from a small bowl, glances at an open book on the counter, notices it is open to PAGE 164.

She peers over toward the front entrance, is mildly surprised by a coincidence: the address over the door is 164 Byng St.

Winston dashes around a corner triumphantly with her book.

WINSTON (CONT'D)

So sorry to keep you waiting, Mrs.
Littleton.

He gently lays down a copy of *Great Expectations*.

MRS. LITTLETON

Don't be silly, Winston. I've put off reading it for years. A few more minutes will hardly be tragic.

WINSTON

Well, it will be worth the wait, I promise. And remember, you'll find something special on page 164.

MRS. LITTLETON

Are you sure?

WINSTON

Every book has a magical moment on page 164.

MRS. LITTLETON

Every one?

WINSTON

I'm afraid so.

She offers a polite smile, wonders if he's been spending too much time alone in the bookstore.

She pays for the book. Outside, RAIN begins to fall but it's a welcome reason to shift the topic.

MRS. LITTLETON

Serves me right. I've forgotten my umbrella.

Winston bounds to the door to retrieve one.

WINSTON

Not to worry. It's small but it will get you home. Somewhat dry.

He presents the umbrella to her.

MRS. LITTLETON

Oh, Winston, I couldn't.

WINSTON

Please. This is a spare. For emergencies. I have mine in the back. I must insist.

She starts for the door, umbrella in hand. Winston follows.

WINSTON (CONT'D)

Ah, Mrs. Littleton...

He holds up a bag with her book in it.

WINSTON (CONT'D)
Forgetting this *would* be tragic.

As she leaves, the door bangs open and mildly soaked KAYZIE KAY rushes in to escape the downpour.

Late 20's, she's a curious fusion of carefree hippie spirit and wallflower modesty under a mop of wet, tangled hair.

KAYZIE KAY
Oh! Really sorry to just barge, you know, but... no brolly.

Winston's heart skips a beat or three. Words won't come.

KAYZIE KAY (CONT'D)
So, if it's okay, I'll just... if you don't mind, that is... till it stops or slows down a teensy bit.

Winston recovers.

WINSTON
No! Of course not. Wait here!

He bolts to the back room. She glances around the shop. He returns with his own umbrella.

WINSTON (CONT'D)
Here. I have a spare.

KAYZIE KAY
Are you really sure?

WINSTON
Absolutely. You can bring it back... whenever you want.

KAYZIE KAY
Thank you...

WINSTON
... Winston.

KAYZIE KAY
Winston. Kayzie Kay.

Her smile may be causing Winston mild brain damage. He hands her the umbrella like it's a ceremonial object.

INT. BOOKSTORE - DAY

Later, he pushes any books which protrude slightly on the shelf back into a harmonious plane with their neighbors.

Winston peeks at a wall clock behind the counter: 4:55 pm. He immediately blinks at the phone beside the cash a split second before it RINGS. He trudges over with a sigh, answers.

WINSTON
 (into phone)
 Hello, mother.
 (listens)
 Because you call every day at this exact time.
 (listens)
 Yes, I can see the rain.
 (listens)
 Of course. I was planning to.
 (listens)
 I don't have to write it down, mother.
 (listens)
 Well, it's Tuesday which means--

He wearily glances at a time-worn note taped somewhere out of the customers' view which lists his mother's invariable food order for Monday through Saturday.

WINSTON (CONT'D)
 Yes, I wrote it down. Now let me see if I've got that.

He reads off the note.

WINSTON (CONT'D)
 Two potatoes. One carrot. Twelve green beans. One chicken leg. You know, mother, if you'd let me buy enough for a few days at a time--
 (listens)
 It'll still be fresh for a couple--
 (listens)
 Okay, I'm leaving in five minutes.

He hangs up the phone, exasperated. He wanders over to a bookshelf, draws down a chunky volume from the highest shelf, returns to the counter.

He opens the book (*Marlowe's Collected Works*) to PAGE 164, somewhere in the text of *FAUSTUS*.

He places it carefully on the counter, removes the book that Mrs. Littleton had noticed.

A few moments later

Winston--in his overcoat--tarries inside the front door with his bicycle, contemplates the journey home.

EXT. BOOKSTORE - DAY

Rain fiercely pelts Winston, who wobbles dangerously on the bicycle. He achieves a precarious balance and weaves away.

EXT. BOOKSTORE - NIGHT

Savage RAIN. Distant THUNDER. The street is deserted.

INT. BOOKSTORE - NIGHT

The window to the street streams a torrent. A blinding FLASH of LIGHTNING stabs into the unlit shop. Rowdy THUNDER.

The store's dusky books RADIATE out their original, vivid colors for a second before darkness reclaims the store.

Another blazing FLASH of LIGHTNING. But this time it illuminates a DARK FIGURE on the street gazing into the shop.

The Figure is silhouetted. Hazy ORANGE EYES and a HAT--possibly a Homburg or a Fedora--are the only visible details.

LIGHTNING strikes the open book (*Faustus*) on the counter.

A thin WISP of SMOKE puffs up off Page 164. The edges of the page curl and darken from the intense heat.

The store's books again radiate out their original colors.

Deep in the store, a SMALL BLACK BOOK sails off its shelf, careens off another stack and comes to rest on the floor.

The rain stops. The Dark Figure has vanished.

INT. BOOKSTORE - DAY

Winston walks his bicycle through to the back room. The wall clock reads: 8:55 am.

Later, he turns his window sign to *OPEN*, goes behind the counter, makes small preparations for the day's business.

He glumly squints at the window, awaits the first customer.

His attention falls to the book on the counter. Immediately distressed, he notes the charred edges of the pages.

He examines it, confused and worried that more may be amiss.

He wades uneasily into the stacks, alert for disorder.

He is alarmed to see the SMALL BLACK BOOK on the floor. He tries to be calm, but the mysteries have sparked minor dread.

He turns the book over: it's Bram Stoker's *DRACULA*. With great trepidation he opens it... to PAGE 164 and...

An OTHERWORLDLY SOUND--a combination of rushing-air-and-water type of *SWOOSH*--surges through the shop and he... VANISHES.

INT. DRACULA'S CASTLE - LIBRARY - NIGHT

A low fire and a few candles provide dim light but Winston detects an abundance of books. There are no windows.

Bewildered, Winston surveys the chamber and inspects his late Victorian attire.

He realizes he is dressed as JONATHAN HARKER, the earnest, young English solicitor of the novel.

His disorientation has scant time to develop as the pallid and imposing COUNT DRACULA appears out of the gloom.

Dracula brushes his hand across a dusty bookshelf.

COUNT DRACULA

These have been my close companions
for many years. I have come to know
your great England through them.
And your language.

Winston, who knows the scene well, cautiously plays along.

WINSTON/JONATHAN

Indeed, you speak excellently.

He amazes himself with a respectable English accent.

COUNT DRACULA

And you shall rest here with me so
I may learn correct intonation.

WINSTON/JONATHAN

Certainly. And may I come to this
room when I choose?

COUNT DRACULA
Of course, Mr. Harker. You may go
anywhere you wish in the castle.
Except where the doors are locked.

Winston savors an unanticipated tranquility.

WINSTON/JONATHAN
I look forward to it.

INT. DRACULA'S CASTLE - DAY

A gloomy chamber used as an office.

Winston sleeps at a table with open notebooks and papers
scattered across a few of the Count's books.

Sunlight slants through an open window but most of the
chamber rests in shadow.

His eyes snap open to see three alluring young women--the
BRIDES OF DRACULA--who whisper and stare ravenously at him.

Their gleaming white teeth and voluptuous lips unnerve him.
Sparse sunlight strikes their backs but they cast no shadow.

They encircle him, slowly get closer, sharp teeth bared.

Winston is frozen with fear. Just as he feels the Brides'
first hot breaths on his neck...

Count Dracula materializes. A red fury blazes in his eyes.
With a mighty sweep of his arm, he flings the Brides back
from Winston, who sits with wide, petrified eyes.

COUNT DRACULA
This man belongs to me!

The Brides laugh bitterly.

BRIDE #1
(coquettishly)
He had kisses for us all.

BRIDE #2
Will you leave us hungry tonight?

Dracula tosses a filthy bag onto the stone floor. Something
wiggles inside. The Brides attack the meal.

INT. DRACULA'S CASTLE - NIGHT

Winston warily explores various dim corridors and stone-walled passages. He tries many doors--all are locked.

The not-so-distant HOWLING of wolves reaches and unnerves him. He hastens to the one door he knows will be open...

INT. DRACULA'S CASTLE - LIBRARY - NIGHT

Winston bursts through the door to escape the haunting cries.

He pushes books into ordered rows. This calms him. A curious smile and an unaccustomed poise alight on his face.

Count Dracula sweeps in behind him.

COUNT DRACULA
Tomorrow, my friend, we must part.
Perhaps we may never meet again.

Winston grins confidently and drops the English accent.

WINSTON
I'm afraid, I must tell you: I know
how this story goes.

He quotes from the novel, restoring the English accent:

WINSTON/JONATHAN
And the last I saw of Count
Dracula, he was kissing his hand to
me... with a smile that Judas in
hell might be proud of.

Count Dracula does just that and spins from the library.

A violent wind rushes into the windowless room. A few books fly from the shelves.

The Brides slither through the door.

BRIDE #3
When the cat's away...

Winston realizes he could be in actual danger as he can't quite remember what Harker does in this scene.

WINSTON
What does he do? What does he do?

The unsmiling Brides bare razor-sharp teeth. They advance.

WINSTON (CONT'D)
Okay, time to wake up now.

But that's not how it works. Paralyzed with terror, Winston searches the room for a possible defense.

He rushes behind the desk in desperation. Eyes frantic, he spots a solitary book on the desk.

He snatches it up and his mind practically snaps to see it is Stoker's *DRACULA*, the same edition from his store.

The talon-like fingers of the Brides scrape, inches away.

Winston fumbles to open the book to PAGE 164, shoots wild, desperate eyes at the Brides then *slams the book shut*.

The same rushing-air-and-water *SWOOSH* sound which brought him here returns him to...

INT. BOOKSTORE - DAY

Winston reappears--in his own clothes. The *SWOOSH* fades.

Astonished, speechless and deep in shock, Winston doesn't move a muscle while he carefully orients himself.

A drop of BLOOD falls onto the cover of the book in his hands. He reaches up to his neck. A thin cut leaks blood.

He snaps his eyes to the wall clock: 8:55 am.

A delirious, unconstrained laughter shakes his entire body.

INT. BOOKSTORE - DAY

The shop is silent. The wall clock reads 4:40 pm.

A UNIVERSITY GIRL (21) dumps a book down on the counter. Winston produces a polite smile.

UNIVERSITY GIRL
This better be good. He's making me
read it, my stupid prof. Look at
the size of the goddamned thing.

Winston turns it over: de Laclos's *Dangerous Liaisons*.

WINSTON
It's quite spicy. There's a lot of--

UNIVERSITY GIRL
--Whatevs... how much?

She pays and leaves, passes Kayzie Kay, who enters with Winston's umbrella and a cupcake in a small box.

Winston feels an electric shock course through his body as she passes him the umbrella.

KAYZIE KAY
Here. Thank you so much. Didn't get wet at all. You really saved me.

WINSTON
Oh, I'm glad to hear that.

She hands him the cupcake.

KAYZIE KAY
Just a little treat. I make them.

WINSTON
Well, thank you. Can I get you a cup of tea?

KAYZIE KAY
Yeah, okay. Wonderful.

Winston hops to it, practically skips into the back room.

While he's gone, Kayzie Kay browses through the stacks.

She audaciously pokes around behind the front counter, spots Winston's mother's sacred food list.

She glances down into the book on the counter, briefly reads. She casually *turns the page* from 164 to 165.

When Winston emerges from the back, she scurries around to the front of the counter, leans on it nonchalantly.

Winston positions a tray with two cups of tea and the cupcake cut in half beside the book on the counter.

WINSTON
Here we are.

KAYZIE KAY
Your store, it's quite lovely.

WINSTON
Thank you, I--

His eyes light on the *turned page* of the book. He stiffens but doesn't want to wreck the moment.

KAYZIE KAY
Are you okay, Winston?

WINSTON
Yes, very well. This cupcake looks amazing. You make them, you say?

KAYZIE KAY
I try. I want to open a shop one day. Cupcakes, obviously.

Winston repeatedly peeks down at the book. His eyes swing across the wall clock: 4:55 pm. He flicks his focus directly at the phone, which RINGS. He answers.

WINSTON
(into phone)
Mother.
(listens)
I'll be late today. Toodle-doo.

He hangs up, rushes to the door, flips the sign to *CLOSED*.

WINSTON (CONT'D)
Calls everyday. You were saying...

INT. BOOKSTORE - DAY

Later, two empty tea cups and no cupcake. Low sunlight slinks into the shop.

Kayzie Kay puckers her lips and dabs on a surreal shade of purple lipstick. Winston would pay a king's ransom if she'd stay one more minute.

KAYZIE KAY
Thanks for the tea and the sparkling conversation.

WINSTON
Sure. Maybe you could come by tomorrow if you're free. I have some very rare books I'd love to show you.

KAYZIE KAY
We'll see. Maybe I will.

His pining eyes are desperately hopeful. She leaves.

Buoyed by an adrenaline surge and a never-before-felt confidence, he spins sharply to the interior of the shop.

His eyes travel mischievously through the shelves and stacks.

He strides confidently to a shelf, pulls a specific book down, opens it to PAGE 164 and... *SWOOSH*... he *disappears*.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Winston rides his bicycle madly, as if racing. He checks his watch, wobbles, almost falls with one hand on the handlebar.

INT. BOOKSTORE - DAY

Winston hustles through the door. The wall clock reads 8:55 am. He practically throws his bicycle down and scurries into the stacks where he...

... stares feverishly at a handsome edition of *HAMLET*. He opens the book and... *SWOOSH*... he *vanishes*.

INT. BOOKSTORE - DAY

A customer, MR. TEAZLE (59), approaches the counter with a book. He wears an uneasy expression.

WINSTON

Did you find what you were looking for, Mr. Teazle?

MR. TEAZLE

I did, Winston. Is everything okay?

WINSTON

Of course.

MR. TEAZLE

Well... your shirt there...

Winston notices a small *gash* in the upper arm of his white dress shirt. A small blotch of blood stains the area.

WINSTON

Oh, my. I think I may have done that this morning. I had some boxes to bring in.

He raises a sheepish smile, bags the book, hands it over, speaks a bit too loudly:

WINSTON (CONT'D)
Happy reading!

While Mr. Teazle pays for the book, he also notes--with furrowed brow--a *cut* on Winston's neck.

Winston follows him to the door, opens it for him.

WINSTON (CONT'D)
Good day, Mr. Teazle.

Mr. Teazle leaves. Winston examines his torn shirt.

Elated, he snatches the spare umbrella and flashes some dramatic swashbuckling swordplay acrobatics.

WINSTON (CONT'D)
Laertes! You scoundrel!

At 4:55 pm, the phone RINGS. Winston answers.

WINSTON (CONT'D)
(into phone)
Mother! I'm on my way! And I've quite a good story for you!

INT. BOOKSTORE - DAY

Winston enters ceremoniously, with a panache befitting a returning war hero. No bicycle.

His appearance is altered now: a flowing neck scarf and a stylish cap worn jauntily askew, hair tousled.

WINSTON
And the handsome hero laughed in the face of his doom, while his beloved gazed with eyes aflame...

He glides with airs to a section labelled *Romantics*, rips down Hugo's *LES MISERABLES*, opens it and... *SWOOSH*... gone.

MONTAGE:

INT. BOOKSTORE - DAY

Winston arrives each day with a new and varied wardrobe for his literary adventures.

His attire *somewhat* intimates the book he selects but he's not in strictly period costumes.

Each day at 8:55 am he chooses a book from a different location in the shop, opens it and ... *SWOOSH... disappears:*

--Day 1: Dahl's *BFG*

--Day 2: Dumas's *The Three Musketeers*

--Day 3: Tolkien's *The Hobbit*

--Day 4: Herbert's *Dune*

--Day 5: Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*

--Day 6: Shelley's *Frankenstein*

From the last book, Winston *SWOOSHES IN* to the shop, looks like he's on death's door from hypothermia.

END MONTAGE

INT. BOOKSTORE - DAY

Winston replaces books on shelves like a man on a mission.

He's transformed in almost every way: wardrobe, haircut, eyeglasses--all new and improved. He looks hip, sophisticated, *desirable*, but also a bit unhinged.

Kayzie Kay slips in unnoticed, lingers near the counter.

Winston spots her from between the stacks, darts over, tries to exude his newfound self-identity.

WINSTON

I haven't seen you for a while.

Kazie Kay appraises him with amused curiosity.

KAYZIE KAY

You look... did you go shopping?

WINSTON

Do you like it?

She returns an enigmatic smile. He holds his breath.

INT. BOOKSTORE - DAY

It's 4:55 pm. The phone RINGS.

Winston--now dressed as if he's just survived a week inside *The Great Gatsby*--ignores it, spins his window sign to *CLOSED*, high steps it out of the shop.

He neglects to lock the door.

INT. SMALL APARTMENT - NIGHT

Winston sits across a drab table from his MOTHER. Take-out food containers cover most of the available space.

MOTHER
What is all this?

WINSTON
It's called Thai food, mother. Try
it. You'll like it.

MOTHER
It smells funny.

WINSTON
That's the spices. Here...

He piles unrecognizable (to her) food items onto her plate, then loads his own. She eyeballs him suspiciously.

MOTHER
What are you wearing?

WINSTON
It's called a waistcoat, Mother.

MOTHER
You look like a gangster.

WINSTON
Here, have some wine.

He pours wine into a couple of dingy glasses.

MOTHER
When did you start drinking wine?

WINSTON
Since I started living, mother. Can
you please try the food?

She picks at something on her plate, tastes it, pulls a face.

MOTHER
Tastes like grass! Where's my
chicken leg and my--

WINSTON

--two potatoes. One carrot. *Twelve* green beans. Well, they're not here, are they?

His bitter tone and elevated volume take her by surprise.

WINSTON (CONT'D)

I'm sorry, mother.

MOTHER

Something going on with you? You've been all batty the last while.

WINSTON

I'm alive, mother, for once. You know, living life, meeting new people, having... adventures!

MOTHER

What adventures? Your only friends are books. When did you ever live life? You don't even have a girlfriend. You've never had one.

WINSTON

That's right. Never! But I will soon.

MOTHER

Pah! That'll be the day. What are you waiting for?

WINSTON

It's what *she's* waiting for, mother.

MOTHER

You have gone batty. And what's she waiting for? A real man, probably.

WINSTON

(quietly)
A hero.

MOTHER

Tell her not to hold her breath.

She pushes her plate away.

MOTHER (CONT'D)

Can you just make me a chicken leg?

He surrenders, trudges to her fridge, opens it.

Later, Mother's behind a TV table, zoned-out on the tube. She gnaws on a chicken leg. Winston's at the door.

WINSTON

Goodnight, mother. I've got to go back to the shop on my way home. Believe it or not, I may have forgotten to lock the door.

MOTHER

(doesn't look up)
That's because you're distracted. By that girl. She must be a real lulu. Don't forget tomorrow. Bring some real food.

EXT. BOOKSTORE - NIGHT

Winston checks the door of his shop. Sure enough, it's unlocked. He pulls his keys, looks into the darkened store.

He steps back with a fright when he sees a shadowed HUMAN SHAPE in the recesses of the space.

His mind blanks with panic. He drops his keys to the ground. His terrified eyes are frozen.

The Dark Figure glides slowly into view. Winston does not move. The door opens on its own.

The Dark Figure speaks in a measured, cavernous voice.

DARK FIGURE

You left it open, Winston.

He turns back, expects Winston to follow... which he does.

INT. BOOKSTORE - NIGHT

The Dark Figure and Winston sit on two chairs facing each other in the shadowed space.

Winston regards the Dark Figure's gnarled, wizened face with dread but also fascination. A sustained, edgy silence.

DARK FIGURE

You have questions?

WINSTON

One.

DARK FIGURE
This is a lovely shop.

WINSTON
Why did you choose it?

DARK FIGURE
It chose me. Tell me, Winston...
you have enjoyed your travels?

WINSTON
Yes.

DARK FIGURE
You have lived as never before?

WINSTON
Yes.

DARK FIGURE
And now you wish to love.

Winston affirms with his eyes.

DARK FIGURE (CONT'D)
A noble plan, Winston. The hero
always wins true love.

Winston's heart soars.

DARK FIGURE (CONT'D)
(darkly)
Almost always. But... you must
travel unaccompanied, Winston.

He fixes an austere countenance on Winston.

DARK FIGURE (CONT'D)
Alone. No passengers. Ever.

The Dark Figure rises, treads slowly toward the front door--
which he *PASSES THROUGH*--and vanishes into the gloomy street.

WINSTON
But she needs to see. Just once.

INT. BOOKSTORE - DAY

On the counter, books are laid out meticulously. The titles
are: *Don Quixote*, *Heart of Darkness*, *Little Women*, *Oedipus*,
To Kill a Mockingbird and *Where the Wild Things Are*.

Winston leans on the counter, tries to make a decision.

Kayzie Kay emerges from the shelves with a book.

KAYZIE KAY
Found it. I just love this story,
it's so sad. I cry every time.

When Winston sees she has *A TALE OF TWO CITIES*, a deranged idea storms into his head. She can't miss it on his face.

KAYZIE KAY (CONT'D)
What is it, Winston?

WINSTON
It was the age of foolishness,
wasn't it?

He springs to the door, flips the sign to *CLOSED*, rushes back, takes her by the wrist, pulls her deeper into the shop.

WINSTON (CONT'D)
Do you trust me, Kazie Kay?

His bizarre behavior unnerves her slightly.

KAYZIE KAY
Ummm... I think so. Winston, you're
acting a little--

He yanks the book from her.

WINSTON
--Good. I need you to trust me.
Whatever you see, just remember,
it'll be okay. *We'll be okay.*

KAYZIE KAY
You're not making any sense.

With untamed eyes, he grips her hand, places the book on top of it, opens it to PAGE 164... *SWOOSH...* they *both disappear*.

EXT. PARIS - PUBLIC SQUARE - DAY

Winston (dressed as SYDNEY CARTON) and Kayzie Kay (dressed as the SEAMSTRESS) hold hands on the scaffold. The guillotine's blade glints malevolently in the white sun.

WINSTON/CARTON
Let me go first. Remember what I
said. Your hero has arrived.

Kayzie Kay's bewildered, now terrified eyes track him as he kneels with his with his head in the lunette.

The EXECUTIONER slowly raises the massive, murderous blade.

Winston smiles with daredevil glee at Kayzie Kay. He surveys the gathered crowd.

With heart-stopping horror, he recognizes the Dark Figure amongst the PEASANTS.

The Dark Figure's eyes blaze with disapproval.

A Peasant from the mob shouts:

PEASANT (O.S.)
Death to Evremonde! You will not
travel unaccompanied!

The blade reaches the cross-bar.

KAYZIE KAY
Winston!

Winston snaps his head toward Kayzie Kay, then searches the crowd for the Dark Figure... who has vanished.

Winston apprehensively plays along with the moment, unsure if the Dark Figure was ever really there.

His voice shakes. He labors to compose himself.

WINSTON/CARTON
It is a far, far better thing that
I do, than I have ever done...

He scours the scaffold for the *book to bring them home*. When he doesn't see it...

... his hysterical eyes conduct a frantic hunt.

WINSTON
Where's the book? Where's the book?
Where's the book?

The Executioner's hands go to the rope.

KAYZIE KAY
Winston?

Winston realizes there is *no book*. He stares straight out with horror-stricken eyes.

BLACKOUT.

THE END