

Context Notes for this writing sample

This is an excerpt from a pilot for a 1-hour urban fantasy drama called "The Gospel of Malchiel", with the logline: "A prodigal angel finds herself saddled with responsibility for both a too-eager teenage apprentice and saving the world from being destroyed by its own heartlessness."

The script, titled "Palliative Care", is divided into a teaser and three acts. The first scene below is the last scene of act one; the second is the first scene of act two; and the third is the last scene of act three and thus the episode.

Relevant characters introduced elsewhere in the full script include:

"Nick" is a surly 17-year-old boy convalescing from an accident he caused himself.

"Rod" is an elderly man dying from natural causes, and Malchiel's last human friend.

"Malchiel" is a Grigori, one of the angels who turned their backs on Heaven for the love of humanity. She has become cynical and jaded about everyone and everything since then.

"Vivian" is a middle-aged woman who was brought to the hospital after surviving a suicide attempt, who has been treated callously by the staff and also experienced some unexplained supernatural events since arriving. She is sympathetic, but destined to become a major antagonist.

-- Abbey St. Brendan

INT. ST. CYPRIAN ROOM 237 - NIGHT

In Nick and Rod's hospital room, all is dark, or as dark as it gets in a hospital. Rod is asleep, his breathing more labored than ever; his breath and heart monitor are the only sounds. Nick lies awake, restless. He squirms, his face pained, grabs the CALL BUTTON and clicks it several times.

NICK
(half-whispering)
Where are you, goddammit? I need pills.

As if on cue, a new OLDER NURSE appears in the door. This one is stocky and brisk, with short white curls. She has READING GLASSES on a cord around her neck and a dog-eared old softcover NOVEL tucked under her arm.

The nurse doesn't even glance at Nick. She goes straight to Rod's bed, checks his pulse and the readings on his monitors, checks the time, nods, then settles in the CHAIR between the beds and starts to read. All the while, Nick watches in disbelief.

NICK (cont'd)
Seriously? You gotta be kidding me!

The nurse shows no sign of hearing this.

NICK (cont'd)
Hey! The fuck are you doing? Nurse!

She turns a page.

NICK (cont'd)
HEY! Aren't you supposed to help me??

The nurse finally looks up at Nick and seems startled for a moment, as though shocked he's talking to her at all. She drops her book and stands up.

OLDER NURSE
Oh! I'm very sorry. What can I do for you?

NICK
About time! I need a painkiller.

OLDER NURSE
I'm afraid I don't have any meds
with me. What hurts right now?

Nick indicates his casts

NICK
Take a guess, huh?

But as she stares at him over her glasses, Nick's expression
turns to confusion.

NICK (cont'd)
Actually... huh. Seems okay now.
Weird.

OLDER NURSE
Oh good.

And with that she sits down with her book again. A beat,
Nick can't believe his eyes.

NICK
If all you're gonna do is read, why
the hell are you in here?

OLDER NURSE
(not even looking
up)
I'm here for Mr. Byrne. He'll be
needing me very soon now.

NICK
Oh right. Like you could know that.
Christ, his wheezy old ass gets
personal service and I can't even
get my pills.

OLDER NURSE
(faintly amused)
I asked what was hurting, you said
nothing.

NICK
Yeah. Well... fuck you.

The old nurse stares at Nick for a moment, then bursts into
laughter.

NICK (cont'd)
What's so fuckin' funny??

OLDER NURSE

'Fuck me'! Oh heavens! I can't remember the last time someone suggested that. And you, saying it that way! Such memories. Fuck me indeed.

NICK

Fine then. Fluff my pillows or something.

She stands again, removing her glasses, and her laugh dies.

OLDER NURSE

You don't need my help, child. Not yet.

NICK

Oh yeah? I'm the patient! I say when!

She leans over him, stern now.

OLDER NURSE

For some, that's true. Are you certain you want the help I give?

As she speaks that line, her voice takes on a reverberating otherworldly quality, and the hand she lays on Nick's shoulder is suddenly skeletally thin and mummified. Nick gasps in sudden terror; from his view, her eyes have gone solid black. More than that, they have become dreadful holes in the world, darker than eternity! Nick can't tear his gaze away, and somewhere in the infinite abyss, just faintly, there is a sparkle of stars.

Nick works his mouth, but he is terrified speechless.

Suddenly Rod, still asleep, sucks in a huge wheezing breath, and his heart monitor beeps faster. The nurse, 'normal' again, rushes to his side. Nick, unable to leave his bed, pulls his sheets up protectively, finds some vestige of his voice.

NICK

Who... what are you?

OLDER NURSE

Shush! Not now!

Rod's breathing comes faster and shallower, with longer pauses between, until finally it stops. The heart monitor

EEEEEE's its warning, but the nurse calmly clicks it off and addresses Rod, running a cupped hand in the air above him.

OLDER NURSE (cont'd)
Come along now. Careful...

A tiny pinpoint spark of light flies up out of Rod's open mouth into the nurse's hand. She turns her hand over, bringing the spark up to her face. It flits frantically as though caught in place. She nods, and for the first time her face is full of care and compassion.

OLDER NURSE (cont'd)
Yes, I know. I'm so sorry. But it's over now.

The spark pauses, then flits again.

OLDER NURSE (cont'd)
That depends on you, I'm afraid.
Goodbye, Mr. Byrne. May your path be bright.

She blows gently on the spark, and it quickly blows away into many tinier swiftly-gone points of light. She sighs, then looks back at Nick, who has watched all of this with saucer eyes.

NICK
How... Wh... Are you...?

Nick can't bring himself to say 'Death'. She smiles gently at him.

OLDER NURSE
Yes. I am. I suppose you were expecting the skinny gentleman with the scythe? Or maybe the pretty Goth girl?

She leans over Nick again, this time with a distant, wistful expression.

OLDER NURSE (cont'd)
I'm a nurse, not a sideshow. My job isn't to scare or arouse. It's to relieve suffering.

He stares at her for a beat. She breaks into a grin, then pats his shoulder amiably.

(She punctuates the 'pfft's with a gesture as though sparks in the air are blowing out.)

The sun, impervious to this tirade, continues to rise.

MALCHIEL (cont'd)
 You absolute bastard. You
 narcissistic self-righteous
 filicidal son of a BITCH!!

Malchiel flings the nearest object to hand – her flask – at the sunrise. In accordance with Newton's laws, it merely goes 'bloop' into the water. She realizes what she's done, and deflates, looking at the spot it sank.

MALCHIEL (cont'd)
 Shit.

She leans on the railing, head down. After a moment she lifts it again, covered in tears.

MALCHIEL (cont'd)
 What did we do to deserve this?

There is a brief sound – two sounds really, one of huge flapping wings and one of a distant bonfire – and suddenly Malchiel is no longer alone. On her left NABERIUS (50s-looking, tall, gangly, wild black hair) and on her right WORMWOOD (60s-looking, stocky, white-bearded, bald) step into view and lean on the railing as well. Malchiel clearly knows these beings; she is surprised to see them but not shocked by their sudden appearance.

NABERIUS
 You left.

WORMWOOD
 He's always regarded that as a bit
 of a slap in the face.

(They both have English accents. Naberius's voice is low and mellow; Wormwood's is relatively high-pitched and quick, with a tendency to replace r's with w's.)

Wormwood plucks a PACK OF CIGARETTES out of thin air with a gentle flash of holy light and offers it to Malchiel. Malchiel takes one, then Naberius leans over and lights it for her with a demonically-glowing fingertip.

WORMWOOD (cont'd)
 That's why I never left. That and I
 couldn't be arsed. You have to find
 some big cause or other to rebel
 (MORE)

WORMWOOD (cont'd)
over and it seemed like a lot of
work.

NABERIUS
Naaah. It started out as a bit of
fun, next thing you know Lucy
throws a war and after a bit of
excitement everyone's doing the
greatest high dive in history.

Malchiel is smiling a bit. They're hamming this up for her
benefit and she knows it.

MALCHIEL
Uh huh. Except the judges gave you
eternity out of Heaven instead of
eight out of ten. Raw deal.

NABERIUS
It's not all bad. Like the man
said, Heaven for climate -

The three of them finish the quote together

MALCHIEL, WORMWOOD, NABERIUS
-Hell for company.

They chuckle briefly.

WORMWOOD
Fellow denizens of the Great
Beyond... let's get a drink.

Those sounds again, and the park is empty.

INT. ST. CYPRIAN EMERG PSYCH WARD - NIGHT

The patients are asleep. The nurses and orderlies are
secured in their office. The only one awake is Vivian,
sitting in the middle of her bed hugging her knees.

Somewhere else in the ward, around a corner, there is a
flicker of red light. Vivian notices it and stares. It
flickers again, then again. She glances at the nursing
station; the people on duty are chatting and laughing
amongst themselves and not paying any attention to the
patient area. The light flickers again, and Vivian gets up
to investigate.

Just around the corner, in an area with a couple of forgotten chairs, Vivian finds a small flickering collection of "fireflies" — flitting points of red light. Demonic red light, but she doesn't know that.

VIVIAN
What on Earth...?

She takes a breath, about to call for a nurse, but a voice stops her:

VOICE
Hello, Vivian.

Though it echoes strangely, this is a single older man's voice, not at all like the whispering from before. It's clearly coming from the lights: they sparkle in time with the words.

VIVIAN
Oh. Good. Yes. Auditory and visual hallucinations. Those new meds are working just great.

VOICE
I'm not a hallucination, Vivian.

VIVIAN
That's what all the hallucinations say.

VOICE
Sit, please.

A force grabs Vivian and forces her into a nearby CHAIR. She is now wide awake and frightened.

VIVIAN
... That part was different. Who...
what are you?

VOICE
Oh, I've been lots of things in my time. Right now, I'm your only friend.

Vivian puts her face in her hands.

VIVIAN
Maybe I need more meds.

VOICE

Oh? Do they work? Have they ever worked? All those different little pills designed to make you stop being inconvenient?

VIVIAN

(looking up)

...No.

VOICE

Do they help anyone? The homeless girl? Or the one they beat to a pulp then drugged? Does any of this, really, help?

VIVIAN

No.

VOICE

Why not?

VIVIAN

Because...

A brief struggle with herself, then:

VIVIAN (cont'd)

Because they don't really want to. They don't care. They don't care at all. The nurses here don't even hear you when you talk, if you're a patient. They just wait for the noise to stop.

(a beat)

Everything is just about making the noise stop.

The voice chuckles.

VOICE

There you go. The true meaning of life on Earth. Rise to your station so you can silence everyone below you.

VIVIAN

That can't be all there is. It's not fair.

Suddenly the lights are huge, the whole area glowing red, the voice shatteringly loud!

VOICE
FAIR?? WHAT'S FAIR?? THERE IS NO
JUSTICE!!

Vivian claps her hands on her ears, but at the same time, the glow, the voice, everything disappears. She looks up, peeks around the corner... nothing. Somehow nobody else has noticed any of this. She sits back

VIVIAN
There is no justice.

She grips the arms of her chair.

VIVIAN (cont'd)
How could I have been so stupid?
There's no help. Nobody even wants
to...

She grips tighter, and doesn't notice that small wisps of smoke are coming from under her hands. She rocks a bit, agitated.

VIVIAN (cont'd)
There's no help. There's no love.
There's no justice.

Suddenly she stops, and her expression clears, the pain replaced with determination.

VIVIAN (cont'd)
There's just me.

Vivian stands, straighter than ever, and heads back to her bed. We instead look closely at the arms of the chair, which are blackened and singed where her hands were. A strange glowing red sigil left behind fades away while the whispery VOICES return, growing louder and louder until-

CUT TO BLACK