

Groovy Night

Grade 12

P. 1)

The sky became dark late in the evening, and the city had begun to shut down for the night. People were either in or headed towards their homes. It was not a good time to be out in Harlem. A man, tall, black, and awkwardly poised, walked down a particularly quiet street. A saxophone case hung over his shoulder. He moved quickly, with purpose. His eyes looked cool, but he was anxious.

‘This is a big deal.’ he thought, trying to keep calm. ‘These cats are huge. I could make some money.’ He kept moving, even quickening his pace. It took him a few more minutes to get to the address, 4511 129th Street. When he did arrive, he found a quaint little apartment house—nothing spectacular, but very nice by Harlem standards.

Room 220. That’s what it said on the scrap of paper he had received earlier that day. He walked in. The place was not well lit. Immediately in front of him were stairs, which he climbed. When he reached the second floor, he got off the stairs and walked down the hall. 220 was at the far end. He could see light coming from under the door, but no sound was coming from the room. He knocked cautiously on the door. No answer. Once more he tried. Nothing. So, swallowing his nervousness, he opened the door.

The room was lit by a huge light, which lay fixed on the middle of the ceiling. A pungent smell filled his nostrils almost as soon as he walked in. It was familiar, almost welcoming. ‘Stinkin’ Pete,’ he thought. As he looked around the room he realized that it was in terrible shape. Records were scattered all across the floor, pieces of food and packaging filled the place, and empty bottles of whisky too many to count were stacked in the corner. A rugged but gentle looking man slept on a very old dirty couch directly to his right. Another man, about the same modest height, but not so heavy, lay on the floor next to him, also passed out. He had on horn-rimmed glasses, and his face was lighter and happier than that of the person on the couch.

“Hello.” Said the man loudly, hoping he wasn’t intruding. “Wake up.” He nudged the one on the ground, who groaned and rolled over so his face was on the floor.

“Leave me alone, Bird.” he warned, only semi-conscious. Silence followed. After a few more seconds, he finally lifted his head up. It took him a few moments to get his bearings, but once he realized who it was, he smiled sheepishly. “You must be Moose.”

“That’s me.” Moose replied, embarrassed. He had picked up the nickname a while back on account of his goofy looks, and he didn’t much like it either. Henry was his name, and that’s what he preferred to be called.

“Well it’s nice to meet you. My name is Bud.” The man’s tone was condescending. “Bird!” he yelled, “Get up. *Moose* is here.”

The man on the couch did not move an inch, but lifted his eyes wide open so that their gaze fell right upon the visitor. “Oh, hey man. Hey Moose.” His voice was cracked and soft. “What’s doin’?”

“You got it, man?” asked Bud eagerly. “You got it?”

“Yeah, you got it?” Bird repeated. The two looked at each other and burst out laughing.

“Yeah.” answered Henry, “but show me the money first.”

The two of them stopped laughing, and, looking irritated, began pulling out whatever loose change they had in their pockets.

“Look, man. This is what we got.” said Bird dully. A little more than three dollars had found its way onto the ground in front of them.

“Okay.” said Henry. He had never seen that much money from any of his customers. He took the saxophone case from over his shoulder, set it on the ground, and sat down next to it. As he opened it up, Bird and Bud began whispering to each other. He could hear them snickering, but did not bother looking up. When he opened up the case, it was not a horn inside, but a series of small brown paper bags, each labeled with a number one through ten. He could feel the two men watching him and the case intently.

“Which one you gonna give us, Moose?” asked Bird impatiently.

Moose pulled out one of the bags that said 2 on it and handed it to them.

“You sure that’s the right one?” questioned Bud suspiciously.

“I’m sure.” Moose responded. “I’ve been doing this for a long time.

“Yeahhh.” Bird hung on to the word for a long time. “Trust the Moose man.”

Moose was aware they were mocking him. But this was the most money he had ever made in a single deal. So what if he had to deal with some humiliation to get it.

“Alright, man.” muttered Bud as he grabbed the money in front of him and dropped it into Henry’s open hand.

Henry stood up. “It was nice meeting you,” he said. “Here’s everything you need to know about me.” He handed them a small white scrap of paper. On it he had written his apartment’s address, his name, and the hours and days he was available.

“Goodbye, Moose!” he could hear them saying as he walked out the door.

Moose walked home that night feeling very good. Normally he would have stayed out longer and tried to make whatever he could, but on that night he felt like he had earned sleep. And so he fell asleep in his cozy little apartment feeling good.

The next morning, Henry woke up and ran his morning routine just as he did everyday but Sunday. He got out of bed, took a quick shower in the men’s bathroom at the end of the hall, got dressed for work, and headed out. On his way to the light bulb factory he worked at, Henry stopped at a Diner to grab a quick cup of coffee and some eggs. He wouldn’t usually do this, but that day he felt optimistic.

Moose arrived at work energized and prepared. He spent most of the day thinking about the happenings of the night before. Would those people he met come back? He ran calculations in his head of how much money he could make if they came back often. He was so excited that he even forgot that he hadn’t really liked the pair much at all.

That night Moose stayed up late working his night job. He stayed on the streets for a long time. Business was not good, and he heard nothing of Bird and Bud. He set home that night defeated, hoping for better the next day. The next day came, and so did Bird and Bud.

“Hey Moose.” Bud greeted him eagerly. “You got that same stuff?” It was dark, and the three of them were in a dark alley.

“Of course.”

Bird pulled a dollar bill and five quarters out of his coat pocket and handed it all to Henry, who accepted it gladly.

Moose did some quick math in his head, opened up his saxophone case, and pulled out the appropriate little brown paper bag.

Bird took it out of his hand anxiously. “By the way, man, I hope you don’t mind, but I told some of my friends about you. You might meet some of them soon. But they’re all groovy, man.

In the next few months Moose made more money than he had in his entire life. It seemed like all of Harlem knew his name. Bird really had told a lot of people about him, and he was always busy. The night started earlier and ended later than before, and there was never a quiet moment. People were running into him left and right. He could hardly turn a corner without being signaled into an alley.

Of course, with the increase in popularity came an increase in danger. Moose purchased a gun a few weeks later, and took extra care to avoid any street he knew police would be patrolling. They were very demanding times for the blooming businessman. He hardly had any time for sleep at night, and he spent almost all of his time on his feet, either walking or standing, working with a machine.

But his hard work paid off. Moose had begun to realize that he could afford much that he hadn’t ever dreamed of having before. He quickly moved out of his old apartment into a much nicer building. He found that he could afford trips to the grocery store much more often than before. He even noticed himself becoming a little chubby from all the extra food he was eating.

Business was great, and everything was running swimmingly, but for about a week Moose heard nothing from Bird or Bud. Since he had met the quirky duo, he had never had to wait a week before seeing them again. A bit uneasy, Moose decided to head over to the apartment where they had first met. As he climbed the stairs to the second floor, Moose wondered nervously what he would find in room 220. When he opened the door, a terrible smell overwhelmed him. This time it definitely wasn’t friendly, familiar, or any sort of Stinkin’ Pete. It smelled like rotting.

Moose was mortified by what he saw. In the same places they were when he had first met them, Bud and Bird lay dead. Their arms were pierced with needle marks and empty bottles were scattered around them.

Moose ran home, horrified. For days and nights all he thought about was the sight of those corpses, dead in part because of him. He went on living the way he had been, except that he couldn't stop thinking about the people who had started this for them. After some time, Moose quit his night job. He threw away his saxophone case, moved back to his old apartment, and retired from the night life. To make up for the lost money, Moose took double shifts on his day job. What he had been doing was evil. He would not continue it any longer.