

Newspaper Article #1

Reclusive Billionaire Found Dead

Pine Bluff Key, FL – Reclusive billionaire Marcus Keegan was found dead Monday on his island estate, Keegan's Point. He was 96 years old. No foul play was suspected.

Keegan had lived alone on the island for 66 years, never leaving.

Shipton, Leland, and Kane, a law firm in Miami, is managing Mr. Keegan's estate. No services are planned.

In unrelated news, Shipton, Leland, and Kane have agreed to accept a mental incompetence plea from a former paralegal who embezzled, then gambled away, \$30 million acquired from several of the firm's wealthy clients. She has been ordered to complete a mandatory gambler's addiction program, followed by several years of probation.

Chapter 1 – The Point

“The Mystery of Keegan’s Point, by Charlie Parker.” Charlie’s mouth was dry as he stared at the words on the page. He didn’t even notice when his friend Toby sat down next to him on the bus. “The Mystery of Keegan’s Point, by Charlie Parker.”

“So, you gonna wow them in your presentation with that one line over and over again, or you gonna maybe read the next one?” Bill said.

“What?” Charlie looked up, and noticed that all his friends were now on the bus.

“Bill,” Toby said as he popped him on the shoulder.

“What’cha do that for?” Bill asked, rubbing his arm and looking at Toby. “You just got here, but I’ve been listening to that line for the last five minutes.” Bill twisted back around in his seat. “My dad says Keegan was just some crazy guy that never had visitors.”

Charlie didn’t say anything. Arguing with Bill would get him nowhere. He just looked out the window of the bus. He couldn’t see Keegan’s Point from here, but Charlie knew the island was only a few hundred yards from the shore.

“So,” Toby said as he pulled the report out of Charlie’s hand. “What’s in this thing anyway?” He started flipping through it. “My dad says Keegan was a thief.”

Charlie grabbed for his report, but Toby held it out of reach. “There’s no real proof of that. He was just eccentric.”

“What about the passports?” Toby argued. “They found twenty different ones with his picture on it. How do you explain that?”

Charlie couldn’t explain it—no one could. He’d always listened to everything anyone had ever said about Keegan. Everything from ghost stories to stories of untold riches. Most of it was too unbelievable to be true, but the policemen that found Keegan’s remains had also found the passports. Those passports, and Marcus Keegan’s body, were the only things that were ever removed from the house.

Reaching again, Charlie snatched his report back from Toby. “You know there’s no answer to that. That secret died with Keegan, or it’s locked away in the house.”

Heather Smith 2015-1-9 8:11 PM

Comment [1]: This opening doesn't seem right now ... It is basically the blurb, so I don't think we need it here, I'm just removing it, but I may need to add something else if this new starting point doesn't work

Admin 2015-1-9 8:11 PM

Comment [2R1]: Will keep this for your reference. I agree with your point. Present opening is immediate, I think this is stronger.

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“Okay, enough about Keegan’s Point!” Bill turned back around to face them. “You would think a smart kid like you, someone who’s been skipped ahead, would find a different hobby. It’s not even a place you can go—wow,” Bill said, as something out the window caught his eye. “That’s a big boat.”

Toby leaned forward, looking around Charlie. “It looks like my dad’s boat, but way bigger.”

Charlie swiveled his head around to see what they were talking about. He spotted a big fishing boat—not the kind of trawler Pine Bluff usually attracted to its small marina.

“M-O-I-R-A,” Bill read the letters aloud. “What a weird name for a boat. What do you think it means?”

“Moirā.” Charlie read the boat’s name. “She’s the Greek goddess of fate.” He turned to Toby. “Hey, I almost forgot. Is your dad going on the camping trip this weekend?”

“No, why?” Toby asked.

Charlie exhaled loudly and slumped back in his seat. “I asked my mom if I could go, but she wants another parent to go on the trip, and I know your dad likes to fish.” Charlie shrugged his shoulders. “I thought maybe he was going, too.”

“Yeah,” Toby said, “he goes almost every weekend—but he already had plans. He left this morning to go deep sea fishing with Uncle Bob. They won’t be back until Monday.”

“Just tell her he’s going,” Bill said.

Charlie groaned. Bill was always the one getting them into trouble. “I don’t know. She’ll be really mad when she finds out, and she always finds out.”

“Just tell her he’s going fishing too, it’s not a lie,” Toby said, as if this made complete sense. “How is she going to find out, anyway? He’s already left.”

“I’ll think about it,” Charlie said, but secretly he was hoping his mother would say yes to the trip without asking about Toby’s dad. He didn’t make a habit of lying to his mom.

As the bus pulled up to the school, Charlie could see his friend Jimmy waiting for them in the quad. The guys were all talking about the weekend trip, but Charlie ignored them. The presentation in fourth period was all he could think about. They hung around outside until the bell rang to start first period and the start of the longest three and a half hours of Charlie’s life.

By fourth period Charlie was sick to his stomach worrying about the presentation. He ate very little at lunch and his pale reflection in the restroom mirror looked more dead than alive. He made it to class and sat down in his seat.

He looked around the room. Everyone seemed calm. They were chatting with their friends or writing in their notebooks or casually reading over their reports—Charlie just wanted to throw up.

Mr. Morgan, the teacher, was at his desk preparing to take attendance, and class was about to begin. The girl sitting beside Charlie looked at him with an odd expression on her face. He tried to smile and nod like everything was fine, but as the final bell rang Charlie started to sweat. His heartbeat plummeted and he felt light-headed and woozy. Time seemed to slow down. The noise in the class faded and the room started to spin. Charlie looked again at the girl in his class. Her mouth was moving in slow motion, and in a long, slow, drawn-out way she said, “Aaarreee yooouuu oookkaaay?”

Charlie felt his head hit the desk with a clunk.

Charlie’s head was spinning as he opened his eyes. He licked his dry lips, wishing he had something to drink. Mr. Morgan was shaking him and calling his name.

Admin 2015-1-9 8:11 PM

Comment [3]: I realize you’ve added this to cut out “turn” but this description is awkward. This is one place where “turned his head around” would be just fine.

Admin 2015-1-9 8:11 PM

Comment [4]: This sounds awkward, possibly because its stating the obvious. Would do well with “Charlie said” here and just leaving it at that.

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Admin 2015-1-9 8:11 PM

Comment [5]: I broke this up to help with narrative flow

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Admin 2015-1-9 8:11 PM

Comment [6]: What does this feel like? Maybe his heartbeat lurched? (hard picturing “plummeted”)

Admin 2015-1-5 3:36 PM

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Admin 2015-1-9 8:11 PM

Comment [7]: This is where using “felt” is appropriate, since in a situation like this the loss of consciousness would focus one more on sensation rather than judgment of that sensation

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Comment [8]: I moved this to above where he is first introduced so we know who he is right away.

Admin 2015-1-5 3:37 PM

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“Charlie, Charlie, are you okay?” Mr. Morgan said.
Charlie pushed up to his elbows, but quickly closed his eyes when the room started to spin. He’d somehow fallen from his desk and was lying sprawled on the floor.

“Be still, do you need the nurse?” Mr. Morgan asked.
“No, no,” Charlie protested. “I don’t need the nurse.”
“Are you sure?”

Charlie took a deep breath and opened his eyes. He nodded, then picked himself up off the floor, using his desk to brace himself. “I’m fine, really. I just didn’t eat enough lunch, and I got a little light-headed.”

“Parker fainted, what a wuss,” Charlie heard from one of the jocks in the back of the room. A few of the other kids snickered as he sat back down at his desk.

“Sorry to cause trouble,” Charlie whispered, not wanting to draw more attention to himself. He didn’t want Mr. Morgan calling the nurse. His mother wouldn’t let him go fishing this weekend with the guys if she had to pick him up at school for fainting. Charlie looked straight ahead. He just wanted Mr. Morgan to start class.

“Well, if you’re sure you’re all right,” Mr. Morgan said.
Charlie nodded.

“You still look a little pale,” Mr. Morgan said.

“No, I’m fine, really,” Charlie said, looking up to meet the teacher’s eyes—his way of pleading with him to let it drop.

Mr. Morgan nodded, as if he understood. “All right, but if you still feel ill after class, you should go by the office and see her.”

Charlie breathed a sigh of relief as Mr. Morgan returned to the front of the class.

“Okay, settle down,” Mr. Morgan said. “The reports today will be given in reverse order.” Of course, this was what he said every time, but then his eyes briefly met Charlie’s and he added, “A to Z. Miss Abbott, you’re first.”

There were groans from the class, but Charlie was relieved. He almost immediately felt normal. The knots in his stomach started to unwind. He still felt a little lightheaded, but not enough to make him pass out again.

“Hey Parker,” Charlie heard a boy say from the back of the room.

Charlie didn’t turn around. He knew it was one of the jocks who sat in the back. Probably the same one that called him a wuss earlier.

“I’m gonna get you after class, Parker—”

“Mr. Clark,” Mr. Morgan interrupted, “if you’re so interested in talking, then maybe you’d like to go first.”

Inwardly Charlie groaned—anyone but Sam Clark. Charlie glanced back.

Without missing a beat, Sam said, “That’s okay, teach. Miss Abbott is lovely—I mean, doing a lovely job.” He ogled Jenny Abbott, his girlfriend and head JV cheerleader. Then, glaring at Charlie, Sam added, “maybe Charlie would like to go next. He looks fine now.”

“That’s quite enough, Mr. Clark. Everyone will go in order.” Mr. Morgan signaled for Jenny to continue.

Charlie was sure half the class was mad at him for the sudden change in the schedule, but Sam Clark was the only one he was worried about. Sam, who had been held back a grade, seemed to pick on Charlie just because Charlie was smart. Sam was a big kid—almost twice Charlie’s size. Charlie hated Sam Clark.

Admin 2015-1-9 8:11 PM

Comment [9]: This is assumed since he’s closed them – cutting here avoids repetition when you mention him opening them below

Admin 2015-1-5 3:40 PM

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Admin 2015-1-9 8:11 PM

Comment [10]: Changed to his to help reinforce he’s at his desk

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Admin 2015-1-9 8:11 PM

Comment [11]: Who is “he”? Charlie or the jock?

Admin 2015-1-9 8:11 PM

Comment [12]: Important to attribute here to help start this next part of the scene

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Admin 2015-1-9 8:11 PM

Comment [13]: To avoid “said” twice, what verb might be better here? i.e. insisted?

Admin 2015-1-9 8:11 PM

Comment [14]: Otherwise this could be Charlie

Admin 2015-1-5 3:47 PM

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Admin 2015-1-9 8:11 PM

Comment [15]: I’m wondering if you can show Charlie’s connection more clearly. What if Mr. Morgan is more explicit in stating why he’s reversing the order? That way Charlie will feel relief that he’s being let off the hook, but then when Sam gets mad at him the reader will know why because of this statement.

(Right now it’s implied and the connection is hard to make)

Suggest you delete “Of course…eyes briefly met Charlie’s and added.” – since that part is only there now to show the hint, but if you make this more direct with a statement from Mr. Morgan, you can do this much more clearer and concisely

Heather Smith 2015-1-9 8:11 PM

Comment [16]: I’m replacing this one with a dash, but I’m not sure what you want me to replace “all” of them with? is this because they are three periods and not an ellipsis?

Admin 2015-1-9 8:11 PM

Comment [17R16]: . . . should be replaced with three periods, no space between them. [1]

Admin 2015-1-9 8:11 PM

Comment [18]: What does anyone but refer to? i.e. being beat up? Making him go first? Ma [2]

The bell rang, ending fourth period. Charlie rose quickly to get out of the classroom ahead of Sam, but had to hang back when Mr. Morgan called his name.

“Charlie, can you stay after class for a few minutes?”

“Yes sir,” Charlie said, catching sight of Sam, who gave him the “I’ll be waiting for you outside” look as he left the room.

Mr. Morgan straightened his desk as he waited for the classroom to empty. “Charlie, you’re a very bright boy, but you must get over your stage fright.”

Charlie tried to interrupt, but Mr. Morgan put up his hand.

“I understand it can be tough, but with practice it will get easier,” Mr. Morgan said as he slid his books into his messenger bag. “Why don’t you practice reading the report out loud this weekend? It will help. Now, you’d better go, before you’re late for your next class.”

Charlie left the classroom thinking about the advice. He knew it was no hope, but he decided to try reading the report out loud again—and maybe get past the first line. It might work.

Charlie was still thinking about this when, out of nowhere, Sam Clark grabbed him and pulled him into the boys’ restroom.

Sam Clark slammed Charlie up against the wall hard enough to knock the wind out of him. Charlie dropped his backpack as he fell to the ground, sucking in air. Before he could recover, Sam grabbed him by the shirt with both hands and hoisted him back to his feet. Charlie’s shirt pulled around his body, almost lifting him off the floor.

Sam pushed Charlie into the wall again. “You cost me a letter grade today, Charlie. What are we going to do about that?”

“You know I can’t control what Mr. Morgan does.” Charlie tried to struggle free of Sam’s grip.

“Wrong answer.” Sam sucker punched Charlie in the gut.

“Ugh,” Charlie fell back to the floor, holding his stomach.

Sam grabbed Charlie by the arm and heaved him back to his feet. Charlie feared Sam wasn’t finished with him and braced himself for another punch.

Just then, a seventh-grader walked in. Sam gave him a look, Wide-eyed, the seventh-grader glanced at Charlie and then quickly ran from the room.

Sam looked at Charlie, laughing. “Seventh-graders! They’re all a bunch of babies. Just.” He punched Charlie in the arm. “Like.” Again he punched Charlie’s arm. “You.” Another punch.

Charlie’s arm throbbed where Sam had punched it. He wanted out of this situation. Sam gripped Charlie’s arm harder, and Charlie feared another punch was coming—then he heard Mr. Morgan’s voice in the hallway. It was getting louder.

Sam tightened his grip as he pulled Charlie closer. “Keep your mouth shut, Parker, or this won’t be the end.” Sam let go of Charlie’s arm before walking over to the sink to wash his hands.

The restroom door flew open. Mr. Morgan came in with the wide-eyed seventh-grader in tow.

“Mr. Parker, is there a problem here?” he asked with that authoritative teacher’s voice when he saw Charlie straightening his shirt.

“No sir, I was just using the restroom,” Charlie lied. His arm and stomach were killing him, but he didn’t want his mother to find out about the fight or the fainting, so he kept quiet.

“Mr. Clark, is there a problem here?” Mr. Morgan asked Sam.

“No sir, no problem here, just two students using the restroom after class. Isn’t that right, Charlie?” Sam gave Charlie a sidelong look, then looked back at Mr. Morgan.

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Admin 2015-1-9 8:11 PM

Comment [19]: Beware “as” in sentence form twice in a row here

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Admin 2015-1-9 8:11 PM

Comment [20]: This action will be clearer if you put it at the end of the prev. paragraph and show Sam’s reaction, i.e. seventh-grader in tow. Sam let go of Charlie and Charlie straightened his shirt, trying to look casual. “Mr. Parker...”

“He’s right, Mr. Morgan. I’ve got to go or I’ll be late to class.” Charlie pushed past Mr. Morgan and the seventh-grader and left the restroom. He wanted to get out of there before Sam changed his mind about this being the end of it.

Charlie felt sick for the rest of the day. He knew his upper arm was going to have huge, ugly bruises—something he would eventually have to explain to his mother. Maybe she’d believe he walked into a door. Events like these were when Charlie missed having a dad the most. Charlie’s father, Jack Parker, had died in a car crash before he was born. He wasn’t sure Bill, Toby, or Jimmy could have handled themselves better against Sam, but they could at least get advice from their dads after it happened. Charlie would ask the guys what they thought when he saw them tonight.

After the final bell Charlie left for the diner. He didn’t run into Sam Clark on the way home, but something told him it wasn’t over. For now, he put it out of his mind. He was excited about the trip, and was hoping his mother would let him go. Then he remembered the lie. He was really hoping she wouldn’t ask if Toby’s dad was coming on the camping trip. He’d already planned to fib about the bruises.

Linda, Charlie’s mother, had owned the Blue Lagoon Diner for six years. The diner was a bit of a landmark in the Keys. It was exactly halfway between somewhere and somewhere else—at least that was what the sign that hung over the entrance said. The town of Pine Bluff itself wasn’t really known for anything, other than Keegan’s Point, which, unlike her son Charlie, most tourists had never even heard of. Charlie, of course, was obsessed with the mysterious island beyond logical reason, but he was a good kid and it wasn’t like his obsession was dangerous. Inside the diner the décor was a mix between a Florida tourist trap and a 50’s soda fountain. Given its name, most of the tourists wanted to know why the place didn’t look more like a lagoon. Linda always told them to come back after a hurricane. They always laughed.

Today it was the usual early dinner, late lunch crowd, with one noticeable exception. Three men had come in earlier and placed to-go orders, then decided to eat in the diner. One of the men, a mid-thirties-looking Hugh Jackman, kept leaving the diner to answer his mobile phone. The other two, an oversized Vin Diesel and a stocky Kevin Pollack, just seemed out of place. Linda didn’t think they were tourists—more like guys on break from their day job, which could have been anything from movie producers to mob enforcers. She hoped it was movie producers. Maybe then the little town of Pine Bluff would be known for something more exciting than a dead guy with too many passports, but she made small talk as usual.

The third man was outside again when Linda went over to check the table. “What are you fellas in town for, business or pleasure?”

The two men were quiet for several moments, then the stocky Kevin Pollack finally spoke. “Pleasure,” he said, in a thick New York accent. “We’ve heard there’s good fishing around here.”

“Yes, there’s good fishing not far from shore. Joe’s bait shop can point you in the right direction.” Linda was not really sure if these guys knew a boat from a moped, but she smiled and nodded.

“Thanks, we’ll check it out,” the man said, smiling awkwardly.

“You folks enjoy your meal. I’ll be back with more coffee in a minute.”

Admin 2015-1-9 8:11 PM

Comment [21]: Look at what Sam said above – he said “this won’t be the end” as a threat. This wasn’t a promise it was the end of it, only that if Charlie caused trouble then Sam would cause more trouble.

Something like “before Sam decided to cause more trouble” would be more specific to the point

Heather Smith 2016-4-15 11:09 AM

Comment [22]: As I’m reading over this and considering removing the Linda POV, I don’t think it is possible because of what the reader learns here about the diner and Charlie’s obsession, some of this I could have Nick overhear, but we also need to see the Mother’s reaction to the odd men and her speculation on who they could be. I may just add a bookend scene at the end with a Linda POV to balance it out, but keep it Nick, Zoe, & Charlie in the middle.

Admin 2015-1-9 8:11 PM

Comment [23R22]: This sounds like a good idea. Linda’s POV is interesting. The only concern I’d have is having it here will make the reader wonder “what’s Linda doing” when Charlie’s on his adventure.

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Admin 2015-1-9 8:11 PM

Comment [24]: I think you can delete this – it makes this paragraph carry on too long

Admin 2015-1-5 5:04 PM

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