

Paul's Case

adapted by
Elizabeth Gonzalez

Based on the short story "Paul's Case: A Study in Temperament"
by Willa Cather

400 West 43rd St. apt 14D
New York, NY 10036
(917) 704-2406
ecgonzal@syr.edu

From behind, we watch a slightly grown out, dark green tweed sport jacket sway from side to side. Pan down to see a pair of freshly polished leather shoes press down into the hardwood floors breaking the room's silence with a loud SQUEAK.

ZOOM OUT to reveal the PRINCIPAL, 56, balding, with pleasant, tired eyes behind a massive oak desk. Surrounding his desk are stern, frustrated teachers who, with pursed lips and crossed arms stare at...

PAUL, 13, his pale twitching lips are parted over white teeth in a nervous smile and the Brylcreem that holds his perfectly styled hair in place shines in the light.

He glances down to make sure his opal pin is placed perfectly in his black four-in-hand and shaky hands adjusts the scarlet carnation that sits in his buttonhole.

PAN UP- PAUL'S EYES. His large green eyes have a miraculously glassy glitter almost never found in those of 13 year old boys. The teachers watch their pitiful source of annoyance mercilessly.

PRINCIPAL

Now Paul, do you know why I've called you into my office today?

PAUL

(hesitantly)

No, not really.

He glances at a teacher to his right, and releases a strained sigh.

PRINCIPAL

Paul, do you agree that the remark you made to Mrs. Henderson in biology class yesterday was inpolite?

Paul shrugs, still smiling.

PAUL

I don't know...I didn't mean to be polite, or impolite, either. I guess it's a sort of way I have of saying things, regardless.

The teachers tense up, snickering and mumbling under their breath. The principal motions for them to quiet down. For a moment he stares at Paul with sympathetic eyes.

(CONTINUED)

PRINCIPAL

Well, Paul, perhaps it would do you well to rid of such a way. Do you think so, Paul?

PAUL

(grinning)

I guess so. May I go now? I'm quite late for work.

The principal leans back in his dark leather wing chair, crosses his arms and nods reluctantly. Paul bows gracefully and leaves. As the door closes behind him, the teachers erupt in an array of complaints.

TEACHER 1

Strange, strange boy. It's impossible to get a reaction from him!

TEACHER 2

There's something very odd about him, indeed.

PRINCIPAL

I happen to know he came from Colorado after his mother died. Quite the cruel father, I've heard.

TEACHER 2

That doesn't account for his peculiarities...especially his attire.

TEACHER 1

Or his demeanor. I've never seen such a strange smile on a boy.

PRINCIPAL

Whatever the case, it's truly a shame.

CUT TO:

2

EXT. CARNEGIE MUSIC HALL, PITTSBURGH- SUNSET

2

Paul stands across the street and looks up at the enormous music hall. A sign above the theatre reads:

Welcome to Pittsburgh's Own Carnegie Music Hall

Paul smiles, genuinely this time. There's an unmistakable twinkling in his eyes. We watch his back as the small boy crosses the street and enters the hall.

3 INT. DRESSING ROOM 3

Paul excitedly changes into his usher uniform and looks at himself in the mirror. His smile fades a bit as he pulls at the blazer, which hangs loosely on his small body. He takes a deep breath and pulls his white smile to his cheeks before walking out of the dressing room.

4 INT. CARNEGIE HALL ORCHESTRA 4

SERIES OF SHOTS

Paul ushers well-dressed couple to their seats like a gracious, animated host.

He helps another elderly show-goer to his seat. The old man pats him on the shoulder and slides a coin into his hand. Paul is delighted. Paul grows increasingly vivacious each time he seats a guest.

As the symphony begins, Paul sighs as he sinks into one of the rear seats. DOWN ANGLE- PAUL'S EYES. We PULL IN and see the reflections of vibrant stage lights dance exuberantly. A single tear fills his eye and mirrors the stage before Paul before it rolls down his cheek and disappears.

CUT TO:

5 EXT. CARNEGIE MUSIC HALL- NIGHT 5

As a light rain falls, Paul, his jacket pulled tightly around him, watches as the SOPRANO, clad in fur and glittering jewels and surrounded by a small entourage, smiles glamorously and is helped into her carriage.

6 STREETS OF PITTSBURGH- NIGHT 6

Paul jogs behind the carriage through the damp grey streets. It stops in front of Hotel Schenley, a brick monstrosity that generates an enchanting warm glow and the gentle hum of music and laughter.

Panting, Paul watches from the wide gravel driveway as a doorman opens grand, gilded double doors and the soprano and her posse disappear behind them.

CLOSEUP- PAUL'S FACE. Raindrops roll down his cheeks like tears as he slowly closes his eyes.

CUT TO:

7 PAUL'S IMAGINATION- INT. HOTEL SCHENLEY LOBBY 7

PAUL'S POV

We FOLLOW the soprano into the hotel. Glittering chandeliers, exotic plants, vibrant, flowing dresses on laughing women who strut around the lobby present a stark contrast to the dark world outside.

One waiter in a tuxedo walks past us with his nose in the air carrying a green bottle in a bucket of ice and another hurries past balancing a tray of bright pink, yellow, and blue petits fours. It's magical.

An enthusiastic string band plays music on a polished marble stage. We watch and listen to them, peaceful, enthralled, fascinated...

END OF IMAGINATION SEQUENCE

8 STREETS OF PITTSBURGH- NIGHT 8

A long, blaring HONK causes Paul to jump back just fast enough to avoid getting struck by a delivery truck. The wheels of the truck barrel through a puddle that splashes up and soaks Paul.

Paul's now drenched jacket clings to his body, making him look smaller than ever. The rain falls harder around him and creates a thick wall of water that barricades him from the magical hotel.

Paul looks up at the hotel longingly before tucking his head down deep between his shoulders, wrapping his arms around his body, and disappearing into the darkness.

CUT TO:

9 ETX./INT. PAUL'S HOUSE 9

Paul hurries up stone steps and passes through the doors of a brownstone. He hangs his dripping wet coat on a hook near the front door and pulls off his waterlogged boots.

Fluorescent lights turn the walls dehydrated-pee yellow. Beyond the foyer in the kitchen, dirty dishes are piled high in the sink. Paul slowly peeks into the living room. The radio blares in the messy, empty room.

PAUL'S FATHER
Where have you been?

(CONTINUED)

Started, Paul jumps up high and turns to face the stairs, body straight and tense like a young recruit facing his commander on the first day of boot camp. He immediately puts his head down.

PAUL
I'm sorry...sir.

PAUL'S FATHER stands tall at the top of the stairs. His bald head gleams in the unflattering light. His stained white t-shirt and suspenders accentuate his massive gut. He shakes his head and slowly walks down the stairs.

PAUL'S FATHER
I didn't ask if you were sorry. I asked where you were.

PAUL
(stuttering and staring at the ground)
Wo-work...the show...it ran late..a-and I...I...

PAUL'S FATHER
I...I...I...You what? You're a lying little rat? Is that what you're trying to tell me?

Paul's father has reached the bottom of the stairs and places a heavy hand on Paul's tiny shoulder. He slowly bends over until his head is level with Paul's. Paul's entire body becomes tense and he stares deeper into his own chest to avoid looking at his father.

PAUL'S FATHER
(softly and coolly)
I do not tolerate liars in my house, Paul. You know what happens to liars in this house, don't you, Paul?

Paul nods slightly.

PAUL'S FATHER
I can't hear you.

PAUL
(whispering)
Yes.

PAUL'S FATHER
I said I can't hear you!

(CONTINUED)

PAUL
(releasing a small sob)
Yes!

PAUL'S FATHER
Good!

Paul's father grabs suddenly him by the shoulder and angrily drags Paul down a narrow hallway. Paul flails around helplessly and looks like a lamb caught in the mouth of a lion. The large man swings open a closet door at the end of the hallway, throws Paul inside, and locks the door from the outside.

CUT TO:

10 INT. DARK CLOSET

10

Panicked, Paul thrusts his fists against the inside of the closet door over and over.

PAUL
(between sobs)
Let me out! Please! Please let me
out! I'm sorry, Father! Please!

PAUL'S FATHER
No! You're going to stay in there
until you learn to be honest! I do
not tolerate liars!

Paul continues to pound on the door and sob. His father's footsteps slowly fade away. Defeated, Paul stops banging on the door and drops his arms.

Paul slides down the wall and sits on the floor, wrapping his arms around his legs and pulling his knees into his chest. He tries to slow his uneven, suffocated breath. He rests his chin on his knees.

PAUL
(whispering)
I hate you.

EXTREME CLOSEUP- PAUL'S EYES. A single stream of light from the hall illuminates Paul's eyes. They don't glitter as he stares blankly ahead. Paul squeezes his eyes shut.

13 INT./EXT. CLOSET

13

Paul wakes himself with a loud GASP. He's still on the closet floor. He slowly opens the door and peeks out. Morning light fills the house. He quietly creeps out of the closet but stops in his tracks as his foot lands on something.

He looks down and picks up a thick envelope that was sitting in front of the closet door. On it a note is written:

Liar- bring this envelope to the bank and deposit its contents. Mr. Kaufman is expecting a very exact amount. Thieves will be punished.

Paul sighs.

CUT TO:

14 PAUL'S NEIGHBORHOOD- DAY

14

In his usual dated but dapper attire, a fresh red carnation tucked into his buttonhole, Paul walks down his block and watches his neighbors with a look of distain on his face.

Women place cushions on stoops to sit and gossip, fiddle with their corsets, and powder their cheeks. Some rock babies in carriages, others yell at toddlers to stop running so fast.

The men sit on the steps in their shirt sleeves and unbuttoned vests, their legs well apart and stomachs protruding comfortably.

A group of boys Paul's age play stickball in t-shirts and shorts. They pause and CALL TO Paul as he walks by, taunting and teasing him. He doesn't belong.

As Paul turns a corner, a billboard on the side of a large industrial building catches his eye. He stops. It reads:

NEW YORK CITY- ITS MAGIC AWAITS YOUR ARRIVAL

Paul stares at it for a moment, his mouth hanging open slightly. He looks down at the envelope in his hands.

CUT TO:

15 INT. TRAIN CAR- DAWN 15

From a cramped third class train car, Paul stares out the window and watches bare trees zoom past his eyes in a continuous blur as a light snow falls. Suddenly, he sits up straight. The breathtaking New York City skyline appears outside his window. Paul's eyes glisten.

16 EXT. NEW YORK CITY STREET- DAY 16

Amongst shiny vintage cars and people clad in typical 1930s attire Paul stands looking up at buildings that stand tall above the bustling city. The snow is falling faster now. The chaos is audible in honking, laughing, yelling, and the rumbling engines.

PAUL'S POV

We look up and slowly turn in a circle. We see pigeons fly overhead, a blimp float through the sky, and lights on billboards flicker. We're in a life-size snow globe.

BACK TO SCENE

Paul's daze is interrupted by a well dressed businessman who slams into Paul's shoulder as he rushes by and a newsie who shoves a newspaper in Paul's face.

Paul manages to push through the crowd and make his way to a vintage checker taxicab on the corner. He climbs inside. CAB DRIVER, 65, with a bushy grey mustache, a cigar between his lips, and a woollen flat cap on his head turns and faces Paul.

CAB DRIVER
(heavy New York accent)
Where ya headed, kid?

Paul pauses to think.

PAUL
Take me to the best tailor in all
of Manhattan.

CAB DRIVER
Oh, well ain't you fancy? What,
your ma a big celebrity or
somethin'?

PAUL
Uh, something like that.

(CONTINUED)

CAB DRIVER

Hm. Well okay then. I got a place
in mind.

17 AROUND NEW YORK CITY- MONTAGE

17

We watch Paul grin exuberantly at his reflection as he stands on a stool in the fitting room of Brooks Brothers on Madison Avenue. A tailor uses tape to measure his arm length.

Now dressed in a fitting old fashioned suit, he browses a wall of brightly colored vintage ties. After a long period of deep consideration, his hand falls upon a purple bowtie.

Looking dignified in a new frock coat, Paul climbs back into the taxi. A trail of Brooks Brothers employees follow him and load several bags into the trunk.

Paul stands in the original J.J. Hat Center. An employee gently places a dark grey Homburg hat bound by a deep purple Petersham ribbon on Paul's head. Smiling, he nods at the employee with flushed cheeks.

Looking poised and expensive, Paul stands before a glass case at Tiffany & Co. Suddenly, he decisively points to something in the case. We see a delicate silver tie clip glisten in the light.

END OF MONTAGE.

18 INT. WALDORF ASTORIA- DAY

18

From inside the Waldorf we see a doorman open a shiny gilded door for Paul. This looks similar to the soprano's entrance into Hotel Schenley. Paul approaches a massive marble reception desk.

The CONCIERGE, 25, thin with slick, jet black hair, a nose that points slightly upward, and a striking jawline, greets him with a pleasant but haughty smile.

CONCIERGE

Good afternoon, sir. How are you
today?

Paul restrains his excitement after being addressed as "sir." He clears his throat.

PAUL

I'm quite well, thank you. How are
you?

(CONTINUED)

CONCIERGE

Quite well. How may I be of service to you?

PAUL

(deepening his voice to sound mature)

You see, I've just arrived from Washington today to await the arrival of my parents. They've been traveling through Europe for several months...Edinburgh, Venice, Paris, St. Petersburg...what one might expect from a European holiday.

Paul stops to rolls his eyes and toss his hand. Boring old Europe.

PAUL (CONT'D)

Anyway, they are expected to arrive by steamer within the week. I've come early to register for them.

Paul watches the concierge's reaction, not knowing what to expect. The concierge simply raises an eyebrow at the strange boy.

CONCIERGE

Why, that sounds lovely, sir. What room would you like?

PAUL

(contemplative)

Hmm. Well, as I've yet a few nights until their arrival, a room with one sleeping-room, sitting-room and bath do just fine.

CONCIERGE

Very well, sir.

Buying all of it, the concierge makes a final note in his book before grabbing a key and placing it in Paul's hand.

CUT TO:

19 EXT./INT. PAUL'S HOTEL ROOM- DAY

19

Amidst whirlwind of snow, we watch Paul from outside his bedroom window. Wearing a scarlet red robe, he watches the winter wonderland from the warm room.

PAUL'S POV

Inside, we look around the room. Fluffy, light green couches accented by pink decor fill the grand sitting room. Through double doors sits a massive bed. Beyond it, a steam rises from a running bath.

BACK TO SCENE

Paul squints his eyes. Something is missing. He walks over to the phone on the wall, picks it up, and dials the front desk's number.

PAUL

Hello, yes, this is room 809. I'd like someone to run an errand for me. I'm going to need 20 dozen red carnations.

Paul waits.

PAUL (CONT'D)

No, no, not roses. Twenty dozen red carnations. Yes that's right. Thank you very, very much.

While Paul wait for the flowers, he paces the room, nervous, as always. He fiddles with the tassels of his red robe and unpacks his recent purchases, admiring each piece with utter delight.

Finally the doorbell rings.

CUT TO:

20 PAUL'S HOTEL BATHROOM- DAY

20

Paul slowly lowers his skinny torso into the warm bath. The bathroom is overflowing with vases of bright red carnations. They sit on the counter and stand on the floor around the bath.

Paul looks around to admire them. Satisfied, he closes his glistening eyes and rests his head on the edge of the tub with a calm grin on his face. He's in heaven. He sinks his head down beneath the water and stays there...longer...longer...longer...

CUT TO:

21 UPPER EAST SIDE- NIGHT 21

In the backseat of a horse drawn carriage with a heavy blanket across his legs, Paul wears his new suit, jacket, and purple bowtie.

The carriage stops in front of The Metropolitan Museum of Art. A light snow falls slowly around the immense structure, making it look like an enchanting palace. Paul gets out of the carriage and starts up the stairs.

22 INT. METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART- MONTAGE 22

Paul walks through the Greek and Roman art. After realizing he's been staring at *Marble Statue of a Youthful Hercules* for a lengthy period of time Paul blushes and looks around, embarrassed.

Paul realizes no one is watching him and notices other stylish museum-goers point to and discuss similar statues; he holds his head a bit higher and passes into the next room. He fits in.

Paul strolls down hall after hall, pausing every so often to admire brilliant works like Monet's *Water Lilies*, El Greco's *View of Toledo*, Van Gogh's *Irises*, and Degas's *Beach Scene*.

MEDIUM SHOT- PAUL'S BACK STANDING BEFORE A PAINTING

Paul stands before Cadmus's masterpiece, *What I Believe*. His head is tilted slightly, his mouth hangs open, and his eyes are wide.

EXTREME CLOSE UP- PAUL'S EYES

Paul's eyes twinkle in fascination. He's never seen anything like it.

DARCY

Erotic, isn't it?

Paul jumps, startled. Beside him, DARCY RHODES, 19, an exceedingly handsome, younger version Gary Cooper, remarkably well dressed in a forest green velvet blazer accented by a royal blue handkerchief stares at the painting with a mysterious smile on his face.

He glances down at Paul. Their eyes meet. Paul is smitten. Darcy reaches out to shake Paul's hand.

(CONTINUED)

DARCY (CONT'D)
Darcy. Darcy Rhodes.

Paul, without breaking eye contact, slowly puts out his hand. Darcy shakes it. Darcy chuckles suavely.

DARCY (CONT'D)
And you are?

Paul snaps out of it.

PAUL
Sorry. I'm Paul...just Paul.

DARCY
Well, don't you agree, Paul? It's erotic, isn't it?

CLOSE UP- *WHAT I BELIEVE*

Pan across the massive painting. Nude men, women, and children of different shapes, sizes, and colors kiss, and caress each other in a pastel-colored utopian world.

PAUL
Oh, I don't know...

Darcy laughs.

DARCY
Sure you do. I mean look at it. It's passionate, lustful, loving, and gentle at the same time. Doesn't it make you feel so...so free?

Paul blushes and shrugs. He fiddles with his tie.

PAUL
I suppose.

DARCY
Well I know that's how it makes me feel. You know what it makes me want to do? It makes me want to make love. I simply don't know how anyone could bear to be alone after looking at a painting like that.

Darcy crosses his arms and looks Paul up and down.

(CONTINUED)

DARCY (CONT'D)
 You're not from around here are
 you, Paul?

Paul shakes his head no.

DARCY (CONT'D)
 That's what I thought. I've lived
 here whole damn life, you know
 that? I'm a freshman at Yale now.
 Say, how about I show you a side of
 New York City you don't see in all
 the books and magazines?

Paul looks up at him curiously. His eyes glisten. Darcy
 looks down at him and grabs his hand for a brief moment. His
 eyes sparkle, as well.

DARCY (CONT'D)
 Come on.

Paul follows him through the bright galleries and out into
 the softly glowing city.

23 WALDORF ASTORIA LOBBY- MORNING 23

Wearing the same outfit as the night before, Paul walks into
 the lobby of the Waldorf with an air of confidence
 completely out of character. His bowtie hangs around his
 neck and his cheeks are more flushed than ever before.

24 PAUL'S HOTEL ROOM- MORNING 24

Paul steps into his room, smiles, and releases a long sigh.
 Sitting on a table in the foyer are newspapers from all the
 major cities. He grabs the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* and flops
 onto the massive bed.

Paul lays in bed reading for a moment before he shoots
 upright. The blood drains from his face as his eyes shoot
 across the page. We see the headline:

**Local boy missing! Stole from own father and fled to New
 York City!**

Then:

**Mr. Cohen has left Pittsburgh for New York, determined to
 find his son.**

After a moment, Paul's eyes fill with tears that fall from
 his cheeks and wet the newspaper, smudging the article until
 it become illegible.

(CONTINUED)

Paul sinks to the ground and pulls his knees into his chest. Beads of sweat drip down his forehead. In a crazed panic, Paul springs to his feet, looks around, and runs to the mirror.

Looking at his reflection, he pulls his old, white, nervous smile to his face, winks at himself, and begins to change his clothes.

25 WALDORF ASTORIA LOBBY- MORNING 25

Whistling a piece sung by the soprano at the the symphony with his hands tucked deep down in his pockets, Paul walks through the lobby and disappears through the front doors.

26 EXT. TRAIN STATION PLATFORM- MORNING 26

His signature smile plastered on his face, Paul stands alone on a bleak platform, shivering in the cold. He clings tightly to his ticket and shuts his eyes.

27 FLASHBACK SEQUENCE- PAUL'S POV 27

We hear the soprano's piece begin to play.

From the backseat of a cab, we see the smiling face of the friendly driver.

Paul's fragile hand runs across a row of beautiful ties.

From the Waldorf hotel room, we watch a mesmerizing snowfall.

Flashes of vibrant, lively paintings from The Met.

Darcy's grinning face looking directly into the camera.

Darcy's hand holding Paul's as he pulls him down a snowy block and turns to smile at him.

END OF FLASHBACK

28 EXT. TRAIN STATION PLATFORM- MORNING 28

HONK HONK HONK. The sound of the train startles Paul. He steps closer to the edge of the platform, intently watching the approaching train. Behind his nervous smile, his teeth chatter uncontrollably.

As the train pulls into the station, Paul jumps. The soprano's piece picks up again.

(CONTINUED)

Paul's small body flies through the air in slow motion and the SOPRANO'S VOICE grows increasingly loud. It is the climax of the symphony. String, percussion, and woodwind instruments unite in organized chaos.

EXTREME CLOSE UP- PAUL'S EYES.

Paul's bright eyes are filled with tears. They twinkle one last time before he squeezes them shut. We see black and the music cuts out.

FADE OUT.

THE END