

## TERMITES FROM FORMOSA

### The Residents' River of Crime/Episode #5

#### CHARACTERS:

Narrator: Middle aged man, pleasant but slightly paranoid

Male Voice: Dry, bureaucratic male voice; middle aged (one line)

Termite Inspector: Man in his mid 30's; fake friendly

Sherlene: Narrator's sister in her late teens; slight southern accent; lots of personality

Marsha Sue: Narrator's sister in her early 20's; slight southern accent; more serious than her sister

Uncle Syd: Middle aged man; crude Australian accent

Aunt Gladys: Middle aged woman; southern accent; slightly harsh

#### INTRO

##### NARRATOR/INTRO

Our lives are constantly surrounded  
by unseen streams ...numerous,  
invisible rivers composed of love,  
power, success, pain ...all that we  
detest and desire. Some we navigate  
with ease, some we seek forever  
...and some are simply whirlpools,  
spinning us into oblivion.

While I am not a criminal, crime  
has stalked me from an early age.  
At this point, I can only see my  
life as an unending collision with  
evil, leaving me with but one  
conclusion: I ride the river of  
crime.

(New music - Episode  
theme; continues  
under...)

## INTRODUCTION TO EPISODE #5 - THE TERMITES OF SOCIETY

MALE VOICE

Recognizing that the Formosan subterranean termite attacks any number of targets from the same colony, defending a single building, a single tree, or any single location doesn't make a whole lot of sense, since they'll just go around it while constantly increasing their numbers.

NARRATOR

TERMITES!!! Criminals are the termites of society! Yeah, okay, it sounds funny ...like I'm making a joke or something ...but think about it for a minute. I mean, criminals are A LOT like termites. For both, success means staying out of sight, and, both are constantly undermining the very foundations of our society - termites do it in a way that's physically very real, but criminals are much more insidious, attacking in emotional, financial and even life threatening ways. And termites are blind, too, I think about that a lot ...of course, for me, on a purely personal level, I'm constantly aware that crime, just like a plague of insatiable termites, is relentlessly pursuing me ...relentlessly

## SCENE 1 - THE TERMITE INSPECTOR

A knock at the door is heard.

NARRATOR

I opened the door to find a man wearing a pair of black coveralls and a silver hardhat. His coveralls said "The Termite Terminator" over one pocket and "Clyde" over the other.

## TERMITE INSPECTOR

Hey! Is this the house that needs  
the termite inspection?

## NARRATOR

I nodded my head yes. My  
grandmother had died recently, and  
I had come home for the funeral. A  
group of family members were  
sitting around the living room at  
Meemaw's house talking. The  
decision had already been made to  
sell the house, but it couldn't be  
done until a termite inspection was  
made. Meemaw's death was not  
unexpected, but we hadn't planned  
on dealing with the termite guy  
until next week, when emotions had  
calmed down a little.

## TERMITE INSPECTOR

Okay ...yeah, well, hey ...it's  
good you guys are gettin' me in  
here. You know there's a certified  
infestation of Formosan  
Subterranean termites not more than  
two blocks from here. CERTIFIED!  
And those little bastards are  
nasty.

## NARRATOR

Feeling a bit inadequate in the  
face of a impending disaster, I  
simply stared at the Termite  
Terminator.

## TERMITE INSPECTOR

...uh ...yeah, I guess I better get  
started ...uh, I'll be under the  
house.

## NARRATOR

Happily, I closed the door.  
(musical interlude)

## CHORUS

Life is just an expectation  
That we all explore  
A lovely mansion on a hill  
With death behind the door

## SCENE 2 - SYDNEY FROM SYDNEY

NARRATOR

I returned to the group, which consisted of my two sisters, Sherlene and Marsha Sue, my aunt Gladys, her husband Syd, and myself. Aunt Gladys and Uncle Syd lived in Australia and had flown over for the funeral; everyone called him Sydney from Sydney. As one might expect, the conversation was mostly about Meemaw, with my sisters doing most of the talking.

SHERLENE

Remember how much she hated cooking? She got uptight if she had to boil a weenie. The only thing she hated worse than cooking was dogs. I remember her saying that cooking wouldn't be such a waste of time ...if you could just eat dogs.

Everyone laughs.

MARSHA SUE

Well ...I do remember one thing she hated even worse than cooking OR dogs.

SHERLENE

What?

MARSHA SUE

...being called "Meemaw." She said Meemaw was an old person's name and she wasn't old enough to be a Meemaw. I think she was ...maybe 83 the last time I heard her say it.

More laughter.

SHERLENE

Poor Uncle Syd never met Meemaw - we're leaving him out of the conversation. Why don't you tell us something about Australia, Uncle Syd.

UNCLE SYD

(surprised)

...huh? ...uh, well, whaddaya wanna know? It's, uh, it's a great place.

SHERLENE

...I know ...tell us about platypuses ...did you ever see any platypuses, Uncle Syd?

UNCLE SYD

Platypuses, eh? Funny you should mention 'em ...platypuses (pauses)...well, I do have a kinda funny story about the time me an' my dad went to th' Coogee Aquarium to see a platypus.

AUNT GLADYS

PLEASE, SYD! NOT THAT STORY!

NARRATOR

Uncle Syd was a short, round, middle aged man who chomped on cigars like they were trying to escape from his mouth. This was his first trip to the States and he seemed more than a little uncomfortable. And my aunt Gladys was not making him feel any better.

AUNT GLADYS

NO, SYD ...I'd rather you didn't tell that damn story...

SHERLENE

(urging)

Yes, please tell us ...please ...please tell us, Uncle Syd.

UNCLE SYD

(obviously uncomfortable)

...uh, well, like I said, it's not exactly a platypus story ...but, uh, me an' my dad were at the, uh, aquarium, an' to get to the platypus room, you had to go right by this huge shark tank. Well, they had just put this 14 foot long tiger shark in the tank and he was right up next to the glass. (Syd begins to warm up).

(MORE)

UNCLE SYD (cont'd)  
It was bloody amazin' so's I walked  
up, and there he was ...like two  
feet from my friggin' head ...I  
couldn't take my eyes off 'im  
...then he just starts convulsin'  
like ...you know, twitchin' and  
jumpin' around right there in front  
of me ...then all of a sudden, he  
just UPCHUCKS THIS HUMAN ARM!  
...like right in front of me

AUNT GLADYS  
SYD! PLEASE!

SHERLENE  
(excited)  
Don't listen to her, Uncle Syd, go  
on ...please

UNCLE SYD  
...uh ...well, like I said, the  
shark, uh, re, re, uh...

NARRATOR  
Somehow, as I watched him tell the  
story of the shark arm, Uncle Syd  
reminded me of a giant bug. He was  
like a big beetle in a tiny jar,  
with my aunt jabbing at him on one  
side and my sisters feeding him  
little pieces of meat on the other.  
...and he also had this weird way  
of rubbing his hands together, like  
they were covered with something  
and he had to get it off.

UNCLE SYD  
...RE-GURGITATES (he spits the word  
out with great difficulty) this ARM  
right in front of me and, get this,  
it has this TATTOO of two boxers on  
it!

SHERLENE  
NO! REALLY? ...you gotta be  
kidding.

UNCLE SYD  
NO! NO! I swear...two boxers  
squaring off...

## NARRATOR

Of course I already knew the story of the Shark Arm. The guy eventually gets off. Since they only had an arm, no one could actually prove that there was a murder. Yeah plenty of people know about the Shark Arm case, but not so many know about the Shark Tongues.

You see, I used to have this job loading cargo onto planes and we had this huge coffin that was being shipped to Asia somewhere. Well just as that sucker was halfway up to the plane, some asshole rams his tractor right into the belt loader. WHAM! ...not only does the coffin come flying off, but when it hits the ground, it cracks open, dumping this fat, naked Chinese corpse RIGHT ON THE RUNWAY! Then, when that sucker hit the ground, he split open like ripe watermelon, spilling these weird pink eel like things all over the tarmac. It turns out they were shark tongues illegally being shipped into China, and there must of been a hundred of them stuffed inside the dead Chinese guy. This kinda stuff happens to me ALL THE TIME.

(musical interlude)

## CHORUS

There's something underneath  
There's something down below  
It's cold and not so sweet  
It's kind of like a troll

## SCENE 3 - TERMITE IN A SPORT COAT

A loud, insistent knock is heard at the door.

## NARRATOR

But then the termite guys came back ...I opened the door and unexpectedly found the termite inspector, shaking, with blood dripping from a small cut on his forehead. He was obviously upset.

## TERMITE INSPECTOR

...uh, uh, we gotta call the police! WE GOTTA CALL THE POLICE! ...and somebody needs to come with me ...under the house ...I gotta make sure of what I seen down there.

## NARRATOR

Leaving Marsha Sue to call the police, everyone else followed the termite guy and me as we went around to the side of the house and I prepared to crawl underneath.

## TERMITE INSPECTOR

It's ...it's under the steps ...you'll see it ...under the steps ...I ...I ain't goin' back.

## NARRATOR

Getting down on my hands and knees, while holding the flashlight in one hand, I awkwardly made my way towards the front of the building. As I approached, taking shape out of the darkness was a small opening beneath the front steps of the building. The hole appeared to have been blocked by a metal grating of some kind that had apparently been pulled away by the termite inspector. Warily, I shined my light through the opening, and there, staring back at me, was a skeleton.

(brief musical interlude)

## NARRATOR

Initially, my emotions were oddly mixed.

(MORE)

NARRATOR (cont'd)

I was shocked, of course, but the shock was mixed with a curious glee ...a certain dark joy taken from my first real encounter with a corpse ...but then, as I looked closer, (he begins to crack up) ...I ...I realized that the skeleton was wearing a ...a very familiar plaid sport coat and a ...a polka dot tie (he begins to cry) - a combination that ...that I'd seen my father wear too many times ...my father who had disappeared right after my 12th birthday. Everyone thought that he had just run away for some reason. I ...I wondered how many times I had walked up and down those steps ...right over his body ...quickly I backed out from under the house, finding my self surrounded by dumbfounded family members. With tears streaming down my cheeks, it was all I could do to point towards the body and utter a single word: DADDY!

(brief musical interlude)

CHORUS

What are we walking over and  
What will walk over us  
Attachments turn to ashes and  
Trust turns into dust

NARRATOR

Immediately afterwards, I kept wondering what had happened. When other relatives arrived for my grandmother's funeral and heard the shocking news, I eyed them suspiciously - had one of them killed my father and stuck his body under the porch? ...but down inside I guess I knew, and a couple of days later, the police report made it all too clear. Like a termite, my father had crawled under the house and even set up a weird little nest for himself, complete with a blanket, pillow, flashlight, a couple of men's magazines and a plate full of fried chicken.

(MORE)

NARRATOR (cont'd)

But I guess that's where the  
comparison ends, because termites  
are social animals ...and my father  
chose to be alone ...for who knows  
how long, reading girlie magazines  
by flashlight and eating fried  
chicken ...until he finally killed  
himself ....the chicken bones were  
still there ...he even broke the  
wishbone ...I keep wondering what  
his wish was.

(musical interlude)

CHORUS

Would we wish if wishes would  
Return the wonder of childhood  
Implied promise without pain  
Embracing empty hope  
Again

#### EPILOGUE

NARRATOR

So, as you can see, the web of  
crime was gradually growing tighter  
around me, and ...god knows (he  
begins to get angry) ...it still  
is. My mother, my sister, and my  
grandmother, while not necessarily  
criminals, were all somehow  
involved in crimes that then  
entangled me ...and finally, the  
ultimate criminal, my father. (he's  
very angry) I mean ...is there a  
worse crime than suicide?  
...cowardly deserting those that  
love you ...need you ...and leaving  
them with empty arms, empty  
emotions and empty memories.