Book Review Of “The Burning Man” By Phillip Margolin Essay, Research Paper

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Peter Hale, the son of Richard Hale, a four-year associate at Hale,

Greaves, Strobridg, Marquand, and Bartlett, has lived his life under the shadow

of his father. Despite having a high five-figure salary and fire-engine-red

Porsche, Peter was constantly trying to overcome the expectations of his high-

class lawyer of a father, who was former president of the Oregon State Bar.

Handling only small-time cases did not present Peter with the opportunity to

outshine his father, who was also a second-team All-American football player and

National Champion wrestler, but when his father had a heart attack and could no

longer handle a million dollar case in which Peter had been helping him, Peter

could not let the opportunity pass. As Richard Hale lied helpless in a hospital

bed, he demanded Peter ask for a mistrial, but it seemed only to go in one ear

of Peter’s and out the other. Peter’s boldness would be costly though, as he

would lose the case and lose his father. Richard did not die, but when he heard

of his son’s error he could not forgive him and couldn’t bare to see him anymore.

Only a fatherly instinct would force Richard to find a meager job for

his helpless son in a small town with an old friend who was looking for someone

trying to regain status as Peter now was. Whitaker was not as exciting as

Portland was to Peter, but he began to be accustomed to the town when he began

his handling small criminal cases and ran into an old friend who graduated with

him from highschool, Steve Mancini. Steve, like Peter’s father, was a football

star, but at the Division II level for the Whitaker State football team. Hale

became close with Mancini and met many other residents of Whitaker through Steve.

One being Steve’s beautiful and intelligent fiance, Donna Harmon and her

slightly retarded brother Gary. Just as things began to become settled for

Peter in Whitaker, he ran into some problems with Gary Harmon. Peter had to

save him once from the police in a peeping incident and then became Gary’s lead

attorney, under some influence from Steve Mancini, as Gary was charged with the

murder of a local college girl.

The night of the murder, Gary had been at a local bar, the Stallion, and

had gotten into an argument with a girl whom he had asked to buy a drink for.

Despite the assurance of a local drug-dealer friend of Gary’s, Kevin Booth and

his friend, Christopher Mammon, the college girl had rejected Gary heavily not

knowing he was slightly retarded. This upset Gary and lead him to jaunt out of

the Stallion and back to his soon-to-be brother-in-law’s house and then to his.

That is when the police arrived and asked him to come to the station and help

them solve a crime.

At this time Dennis Downes and Bob Patrick, the officers who brought him

there, began to question him about his whereabouts the night before and about

his information on the murder that occured that night in Wishing Well park. The

questions led to Dennis Downes putting words into Gary’s mouth about the murder

and Bob Patrick intimidating Gary into believing he had supernatural powers and

could remember everything about the crime, or in essence that he really did

commit the crime.

This would be the basis of Peter’s defense case of Gary Harmon. He

would use the entire script of this interogation of Gary Harmon to try to

establish that Gary was coerced into giving the details of the crime that were

fed into his mind by the police, but Peter was still not sure that Gary did not

commit this crime. His beliefs were that there was no way Gary did this, and

his heart told him that if he didn’t win this trial, his life would be

indefinately over and if he did he would experience a new beginning.

The trial was not the only thing happening to Peter, as Steve and his

now wife began to have troubles. Steve took out his emotions on his wife and

hit her many times. Peter was the one who was always there for Donna and was

becoming attached to her and her brother whom he was defending. This would add

even more pressure and confusion to Peter’s life.

Things began to unwind and in the end a corrupt Becky O’Shay and Steve

Mancini aided in the coverup of the murderer, Kevin Booth, in order to coverup

their drug use. Booth’s under-cover FBI agent partner helped Steve Mancini

uncover the truth, that the gril was killed by Booth over drugs and drug money.

Gary ends up free after being convicted of murder while Peter ends up on the

same page as his father and in love with the beautiful and intelligent Donna

Harmon, whom he will marry and live with in the beautiful, quiet city of

Whitaker, Oregon.

Gary Harmon, unlike most others, sometimes needs others to think for him.

Whether or not the right people think for him or not is what makes this story.

It began in the Stallion, when Kevin Booth and Christopher Mammon told Gary to

ask a girl at the bar whether he could buy her a drink. They knew that she

didn’t want him to, but with just a little persuasion, Gary was led into a

delusional world, believing that the girl wanted him to buy her a drink and

perhaps take her home after that. When he was so abruptly brought out of his

delusional world, he became violent. After that, when Gary was brought into the

questioning room of the police station the next day, two police officers

desperately searcing for some answers also began to think for Gary Harmon.

After a series of questions to which they supplied the answers, they had Gary

believing that he had supernatural powers and that he could recall the past,

even that of which he had not experienced. They used this information to put

Gary on trial for a murder which they created in his mind. It took Peter Hale,

whom in himself he had no belief, to believe and think correctly for Gary Harmon

and save his innocent life from others who thought nothing of it.

Margolin used this story to symbolize all of those who live in

delusional worlds, some believing they know everything or some not knowing what

they know, and show how vulnerable those people can be. It is the people who

fight for the well-being of people in delusional worlds and try to convince them

to face reality that save them from disaster. This creates a great universal

appeal in this story, because everyone knows someone who lives in a delusional

world and can relate to the efforts of Peter Hale.